

Sri Ramakrishna and His Gospel

Volume I



Swami Bhuteshananda

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The uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna lies not only in that he practised various spiritual disciplines of Hinduism and other religions, but also in that he realized God through each path. From his own experience he could proclaim, 'As many faiths, so many paths.' Men and women of all classes came to him, irresistibly drawn by the power of his words—a power drawn from his extraordinary realizations and which penetrated to the very depths of their being. Though he used simple words and lively stories, his conversations were profound. Fortunately, many of these wonderful conversations were recorded with almost stenographic accuracy by one of his disciples, and they were later published in Bengali under the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* and in English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

The present work is based on the weekly discourses given by Swami Bhuteshananda on the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. During his illuminating discussions, the Swami consistently went to the heart of the Master's words and uncovered the deeper meaning behind his simple utterances. With the Swami's guidance given in this volume we are able to comprehend more easily Sri Ramakrishna's sayings in the light of the ancient scriptures as well as modern thought.

Once, while explaining the significance of his Master's life, Swami Vivekananda said: 'The life of Sri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary search light, under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of the Hindu religion. He showed by his life what the *rishis* and *avatars* really wanted to teach. The books were theories, he was the realization. This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life, and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations.'



Sri Ramakrishna at the Studio of Bengal Photographers, Calcutta

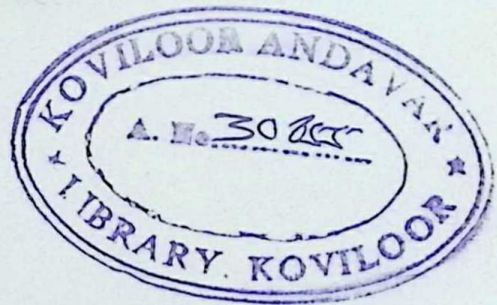
SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS GOSPEL

Volume I

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

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DEDICATION

*Just as one worships the Ganga with water drawn from
the Ganga, similarly, this book is offered with a
reverential heart at the lotus feet of the Master, who is
the source of the ambrosial words it contains.*

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

English-reading people interested in religious literature and spiritual life are, we believe, by and large acquainted with *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which is the English translation by Swami Nikhilananda of the Bengali religious classic *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* by M. (Mahendranath Gupta). This magnificent work presents 'the daily life and conversations of Sri Ramakrishna in an interesting and realistic way'. In the words of Mr. Aldous Huxley it is 'a book unique,... in the literature of hagiography,... Never have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity.' About this great religious teacher Swami Vivekananda observed: 'His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought... His life alone made me understand what the shastras really meant, and the whole plan and scope of the old shastras.... His life is the living commentary to the Vedas of all nations.'

For nearly a decade Reverend Swami Bhuteshananda (1901–1998), the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Order, devoted his weekly Bengali religious classes to discussions on Sri Ramakrishna—a living embodiment of love, devotion, knowledge, service and yoga—and to this unique religious book, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)*. His illuminating discussions brought out the thought-provoking deeper dimensions of the simple, homely utterances of the great prophet, and they helped the audience comprehend these

simple sayings of the Great Master in the light of the ancient scriptures of India, specially the Vedānta, as well as modern thought. Not unoften, many abstruse concepts, many knotty philosophical questions and doubts of Vedānta metaphysics, were lucidly explained and resolved. That is why a few of the spiritual seekers in this earnest and devoted audience decided to record and transcribe these talks. These transcripts were eventually published in a seven-volume Bengali work *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita Prasanga*. The present work, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Gospel*, Volume 1, is an English translation of the first three volumes of the original Bengali book. The translator, Mr. Dharitri Kumar Das Gupta, has tried his best to make the translation free from error and faithful to the spirit of the original. Swami Sunirmalananda of the Ramakrishna Order, under the advice of the author, has gone through the translation and given valuable suggestions. It is to be noted that for the readers' convenience the chapters in this English translation have been arranged chronologically as in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

We are indebted to all who have put in their labour of love to publish both the original Bengali work and this English translation, and also to the Udbodhan Office (the principal Bengali Publishing Centre of the Ramakrishna Order) for granting us permission to bring out an English translation of the book.

Let us now hope and pray that this venture of ours will be of help to the readers in comprehending deeply the words of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and reflecting on the life of the great world-teacher, the fountainhead of the *Gospel*.

Calcutta

10 September 2000

Publisher

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE ORIGINAL BENGALI EDITION

Through the boundless grace of the supremely compassionate Sri Ramakrishna, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita Prasanga* is being published in book form. Some of the devotees, of their own accord, used to record the discussions on the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*), which were given at the weekly religious classes held first at Belur Math, and thereafter at the Ramakrishna Yogodyana Math. Later, these recordings were transcribed. Initially, Sri Samir Kumar Roy took upon himself this task and faithfully carried it out for a long time. Not only when he lived near Belur Math, but even after shifting his residence to Calcutta, he carried on this work with equal zeal, not withstanding the difficulties which presented themselves due to the change of his residence. Only when he had to leave Calcutta permanently was he forced to relinquish this work. In the meantime, however, inspired by his exemplary initiative, some other devotees who were regular participants of the weekly classes took this task upon themselves. Thus the discussions on the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* were preserved uninterruptedly.

Many of the devotees desired that these discussions be printed in the form of a book. For this purpose, Prof. (Mrs.) Basanti Mukhopadhyaya and Mr. Arun Kumar Mitra rewrote the manuscripts and made them suitable for publication. Swami Niramayananda, president of the Ramakrishna Math, Mumbai, corrected the manuscripts, and the Udbodhan Office

took the responsibility for publishing it. The printing of the book was speedily completed due to the enthusiasm of Sri Arun Chandra Majumdar, proprietor of M/s Ava Press. Sri Dvijendranath Basu, Head of the Linguistics department, Calcutta University, greatly helped in the work of proof-reading. But for the combined efforts and co-operation of these persons and organizations, the book could not have been published in such a short time.

Doubtless, many mistakes are still present in the book due to our inadvertance for which we are sorry. As the discussions were held at weekly intervals, some topics might have been left out; again, others may have been repeated at places. It has not been possible to avoid these repetitions, and we pray that we may be excused for this error.

In spite of its imperfections, the book, even without being thoroughly corrected, is being published due to the earnest request of the devotees. It is hoped that the readers will overlook the mistakes and concentrate on the holy topics which form the subject of discussion in this book. If these discussions can help the reader appreciate the beauty and charm of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* in the least, the author will consider his service to be fruitful.

Sri Sri Kali Puja, 1979

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INTRODUCTION

The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna firmly believe that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* contains the essence of all the scriptures. Besides, we do not know of any other work in which spiritual truths have been explained in such a simple manner as in this book, so as to be easily understood by everyone. So, there is no doubt that it is extremely beneficial for everyone to study and assimilate the teachings of the *Gospel*.

Repetitions in the Scriptures

In the *Gospel* one may find that the same thing is repeated in different places. Far from being imperfections, these repetitions are extremely beneficial. Our scriptures are considered eternal. As Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā*: 'That ancient Yoga itself has been taught to you by me today.'¹

What was said in ancient times repeatedly was restated by Him to Arjuna in the *Gītā*. God appears age after age and declares the same eternal truths of religion. Repeated incarnations of God and His repetition of the same eternal truths does not suffer from redundancy. The scriptures never tire in putting across the same message again and again. This is because our minds are such that even after hearing something time and again, it is doubtful if anything is registered at all. That is why the scriptures unceasingly repeat it. It is like a mother instructing her child repeatedly for its benefit. She does not get irritated repeating something again and again, for

her only concern is the welfare of her child. In the same way, the scriptures repeat things in various ways. We come across the same pattern in the *Gospel*. Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, Hriday, asked him once: 'Well, uncle, why do you say the same thing time and again?' Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'Why should I not?' The idea is that if the same advice is not repeated time and again how can it make an impression on distracted minds like ours? That is why the scriptures must repeat things, and we should hear them repeatedly. Hence the *śāstras* never suffer from redundancy. It is said in the *Bhāgavata* that the sages stated on one occasion that the words of God are 'Sweet, sweet at every stage'.² The more we hear them the more we gain renewed strength, as it were, thus enabling us to taste their essence with greater vigour. As days pass by and as we hear these words more and more, our understanding grows deeper, and we absorb their sweetness in greater measure. It is therefore necessary to listen to them often.

*The Essence of the Gospel's Nectar-like Words:
They are Simple and of Contemporary Significance*

We shall thus try to taste that nectar (i.e., the *Gospel*) which will deliver us from this ocean of birth and death. His grace permitting, if we can assimilate even some of its inner significance, our lives shall become blessed. And if by chance we somehow taste even a drop of that nectar, we shall become immortal. This is why the words of Sri Ramakrishna have been called nectar (*amrita*). M. could not find any other comparable expression; he named it *Kathāmrita* (nectar-like words) keeping in mind the words of the *Bhāgavata*. For ages to come people will drink this nectar and become immortal. This eternal message will reach every home, enter every human heart, and make every one immortal. One does not need any special qualification to drink this nectar. The study of the scriptures presupposes the possession of special qualifications; a person has to attain some knowledge, which qualifies him or her to

study the scriptures. To study the *Gospel*, however, one need not possess any special aptitude. A person who does not know anything may understand the *Gospel* more easily. Knowledge of many things confuses a person and increases doubts. Fundamentally, 'Knowledge of the One' is true knowledge. In his first visit to Sri Ramakrishna, M. learnt 'that to know God is knowledge and not to know Him is ignorance.'

This is worth noting. It was something new to M. He had gone to Sri Ramakrishna with a pure mind. For this reason the Master accepted him as his own from the very beginning. Quite unconscious of it himself, Sri Ramakrishna conferred on M. the special responsibility of the dissemination of his message throughout the world. When this saintly and learned M. went to the Master, the first issue that was raised made him realize that 'to know God is knowledge, and not to know Him is ignorance.' There is no doubt that our intellect gets a little refined when we read a few books. But if our mind is not purified, intellectual refinement will not help us much in realizing the Truth. 'Reading books makes one a parrot, not a pundit', as a popular Hindi couplet says. The Master said that a trained bird repeated 'Rādhā-Krishna' and so many other things. But 'when the cat pounces upon the bird, the bird only squawks and does not say, "Rāma, Rāma, Hare-Krishna".' Scholarship sharpens a person's intellect, makes a good orator of him, and equips him with the power to charm others by his talks. But it does not dispel his doubts. Learning alone does not lead a man to God.

The path to God-realization is altogether different. No one can reach Him through scholarship. It is said in the Upanishad: 'The Ātman is not attained through study.'³ It is not that by acquiring knowledge of various scriptures one will necessarily become a bhakta or a jnānī. On the contrary, too much study confuses one's understanding. It is said: 'Do not study many śāstras as it tires out the speech organ.'⁴ Excessive study disturbs the intellect. Study of the scriptures is necessary to purify the intellect, refine it, and to achieve concentration. But

the scriptures themselves say that too much study distracts the intellect. Sri Ramakrishna asked Vaikunthanath Sanyal one day: 'Have you read works like *Panchadaśī*?' Sanyal replied: 'What are they, Sir? I do not know.' Hearing his reply the Master said: 'Good that you have not. Some boys read those books and, giving themselves airs, come here; they will not practise anything, they simply come to argue. That is a torment to me.' By studying some books and suffering from intellectual indigestion one becomes a learned fool! A person thinks himself to be a great pundit, but actually he is a fool and worse, he does not know that he is a fool. It is for this reason that the scriptures say that one cannot know God through extensive study of the scriptures. If there comes a little religious feeling one immediately starts reading such Vedāntic works like the *Gītā*, *Panchadaśī*, etc. But what is the result? The result is unsettling of one's mind! Shall we not study the scriptures then? Neither Sri Ramakrishna nor the scriptures say this. We should study. But let us first acquire the necessary requisites like faith and discrimination, which are indispensable for such a study. We can easily understand the extent to which the scriptures can confuse people by seeing the endless schools of thought. Some say that the scriptures mean one thing, while others assert that they mean something else. Even today the disputes have not been resolved. The reason why there has been no solution is that everybody is fighting over the chaff. Nobody is able to reach the essence of the holy texts. The Master said: 'The scriptures contain a mixture of sand and sugar, as it were. It is extremely difficult to separate the sugar from the sand.' That is why we are unable to understand the scriptures easily.

Then what is the way out? The way out is to study the scriptures in the light of the lives of those who have manifested the truth in their own lives. Otherwise we cannot understand the holy scriptures. If we try to comprehend the scriptures independently, using our own intellect, it is quite impossible for us to grasp their essence. This is because we get entangled in the multiplicity of words and remain confused. It is just like

many Western scholars who, in their efforts to decipher the meaning of the scriptures, used abstruse language and actually created limitless confusion. This is but natural, because their minds, the instrument with which they tried to understand the holy texts, were not purified. Therefore, the true significance of the holy texts could never be revealed to those minds. So, the only way left is to understand the scriptures in the light of those who have lived the spiritual truths and in turn imparted life to the scriptures after much sacrifice. There is no other way.

From this point of view the *Gospel* will be an infallible guide to us. Through no other source can we understand truths so easily as we can through this. We doubt whether we can ever find such appropriate and easy solutions anywhere else to all the problems humanity has been facing since the beginning of the world. The Master used to say that the coins that were current during the reign of certain kings were not valid during that of others. He further said that: 'Suppose a man is laid up with fever. If you attempt a slow cure with the old-fashioned indigenous remedies, he will soon die. He can't stand much delay. Nowadays the drastic "D. Gupta" (a patent fever medicine containing a strong dose of quinine) mixture is appropriate.' The message is this: Old methods cannot solve modern problems. Times have changed. Many problems have come up which were not there earlier. Some new remedies are needed to solve these new problems.

Nārada's Way of Devotion

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna and in the *Gospel* we find unique solutions to these new problems. It is surprising to see the diverse remedies the Master has given to solve the problems we face in our lives. He said that in the past people used to perform various rituals and austerities. 'Now in the Kali-yuga the human mind is weak and people are dependent on food. So to cure the malady of worldliness the chanting of God's name with concentration is enough.' He further said:

'Where do you have the time to perform austerities like the rishis of the ancient days did? Your life is short and dependent on food. You don't have the time. Neither is it necessary for you to undertake the ostentatious rituals.' But he did tell us other things we should do. He speaks about Nārada's way of devotion. This devotional path is not exclusive to any particular sect. The essence of Nārada's way of devotion is that it is pure, implicit faith in God which makes a devotee take refuge and totally surrender himself to God. He even showed us how to pray for it: 'Mother! I do not know anything. Teach me everything. Give me proper understanding. I do not know how to reach you. Please make me do what I should do.' This kind of total surrender is Nārada's way of divine love. The idea is, one wants nothing from Him but Him alone. Here God is perceived not as a means to some end. We do not seek Him to cure our ailments, to increase our wealth, to keep our relations happy and grant them long life—these are not the aims. These are natural desires of the human mind. But Sri Ramakrishna forbade us from praying to God for the fulfilment of these worldly desires. Why? The Master said: 'Does anybody approach the King for pumpkin, gourd, etc.? God can give that. It is not that He is incapable of giving these things. But He can give many other things. He is the Wish-fulfilling Tree. If we can get anything that we ask, why settle for insignificant things? Why not ask Him for Himself? If we once get Him, nothing else remains to be had!' 'Obtaining which one does not think of any other acquisition to be superior to that'⁵, says the *Gītā*.

It is stated in the story of Dhruva that, mortified by the abuses and insults of his stepmother, Dhruva set out for tapasyā at his mother's bidding. He wanted to acquire a kingdom bigger than that of his father. This is the way children think. He had been insulted, so he wanted a larger kingdom than his father's. He began praying to God with unwavering concentration. God had to respond to the sincere, intense prayer of the child. Appearing before Dhruva, He asked, 'Tell me, what boon do you want?' Dhruva was in a dilemma and said: 'Boon! I do not want

a boon.' 'How is it? Think again. Perhaps you wanted something which made you perform tapasyā.' Then Dhruva remembered: 'Well, yes. I was seeking a huge kingdom. This is why I started my tapasyā. But I have since acquired a thing of far greater value than what I wanted. I set out in search of glass pieces, but have got gold. A valuable thing indeed! I do not need your boon any longer. O my Lord, I have attained fulfilment. I do not want your boon!' This is called unconditional devotion, selfless devotion, Nārada's way of devotion. This type of devotion suits people belonging to any sect of Hinduism. Not only Hindus, the followers of other faiths can also practise it. Without having this type of devotion, one cannot enter the spiritual world. We find this simple advice time and again in the *Gospel*.

Sri Ramakrishna—His Life and Teachings

More than anything else, we should observe the life of Sri Ramakrishna. All his teachings are enlivened by his life. His words are not mere words; they are all reflected in his life. His life stands as a testimony to what he preached. Hence we shall easily understand the *Gospel* if we direct our attention towards his life. He appeared solely for this purpose in this age of uncertainty and unrighteousness. Admirers of Sri Ramakrishna bear the conviction that with his birth the millennium (Satya-yuga) has begun. Swami Vivekananda also used to say so. We are born at the beginning of this Golden Age, or Satya-yuga. It is not an insignificant thing! We have been born in an age when the radiant influence of Sri Ramakrishna is spreading far and wide in all directions. We are face to face, as it were, with a condensed form of a vast mass of energy. It is as if we have stationed ourselves beside the Sun. However, this Sun does not burn; it soothes. There is nothing frightening in Sri Ramakrishna. We shall not find anything to be afraid of when we read his life. Even a small child does not feel scared of him. He has no matted hair, no ashes smeared on his body, no awful paraphernalia, nor does he raise terrifying sounds.

The Master's teachings do not contain a single difficult word to baffle our understanding. He speaks in a simple manner so that we can understand what he says without the least difficulty. Our minds are not confused. About love of God he says: 'How should we love Him? Our love for God should be like our love for our father and mother.' He further adds: 'God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of the worldly man for his worldly possessions, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for his chaste wife.' All of us understand the nature of these attractions, since we experience these feelings in our own lives more or less. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'If one feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions, then one can attain Him.' It does not require much scriptural knowledge to understand this.

The Master does not advise us to engage in any extraordinary sādhanā in order to attain Him. Indeed, his methods are simple. Where should we meditate upon Him? He said, 'To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest.' Not all of us can go to a forest. A corner means the secluded corner in one's own home. It is enough if we call upon Him there. If no such corner is available, then one can do so in one's own mind, regardless of the surroundings.

Then someone said, 'But, Sir, we have no time for such elaborate spiritual practice.' The Master replied: 'Then salute Him at the two junctions of day and night and pray: "O, Lord! I have no time to meditate on you. Kindly pardon me and be gracious!"' Sri Ramakrishna has made things very simple: only two salutations—in the morning and in the evening!

Girish Ghosh and the Power of Attorney

While advising Girish, Sri Ramakrishna said: '...remember and think of Him every morning and evening.'

Girish wondered: 'Where's the time to remember Him twice a day? I remain busy with many things throughout the day.' Observing Girish's silence, the Master understood what was going on in his mind. He said: 'Remember Him at least once before taking food and once before going to bed.' Girish still remained silent. He was unable to reply and thought: 'I have no fixed time for dining and retiring. One day I may eat at ten in the morning, while some other day at five in the afternoon. I always remain engaged in lawsuits and the like. So how can I give my word? But the Master has asked me to do such a simple thing. How can I refuse?' The despondent Girish remained silent. Understanding the state of Girish's mind, the Master said: 'You seem to say, "I cannot do even that." Very well, then give me the power of attorney.' Has anybody ever taught us religion in this manner and in such an easy way? We should, however, keep in mind that while teaching religion in such an easy way he never diluted its gravity by any means. Indeed, there was no compromise on any account. Not a tinge of adulteration! And Girish realized this many days later. The Master not only advised Girish to give him the power of attorney, but he also taught him the basics of that mood. It has been stated in *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master* that one day in the course of some conversation Girish said in the presence of the Master, 'I will do it' in respect of a trifling matter. At this the Master said disapprovingly: 'Look here, why do you say, "I will do it?" Suppose you cannot do it. What then? You should say, "I will do it if God so wills."' Girish on his part felt: 'This is quite right. I completely placed on God all my responsibility, and He has accepted it. I can do a thing only if He thinks it proper and good for me and allows me to do it.' Girish later said, 'Did I know then that so much lay hidden in this simple act of giving the power of attorney?' For he came to realize that he had to watch himself at every step and at every breath whether in all his thoughts and deeds he was depending on Him and His power, or on his little 'I'.

The World and Sādhana

The Master never advises that everybody should renounce the world. He does not teach all have to give up everything and go away, leaving their hearth and home. One day a Brāhmo devotee said: 'Whatever he may say now, one fine day he will "sting" you!' That is, afterwards he shall sting you like a poisonous snake in such a way, that nothing will remain of your hearth and home, and relations. The Master replied: 'Why do you say that? I've never asked you to renounce everything. I say only this much: Do your worldly duties but call on God as well. When you break a jackfruit after rubbing your hands with oil, then its sticky milk will not smear your hands. There is no harm in living in this world. But if you hold on to Him, then the impurity of the world will not touch you.' This is Sri Ramakrishna's advice. He says, 'Spin around after holding the pillar, and then you will not fall.' It is stated in the *Bhāgavata* that Kavi, one of the nine yogīs, was advising King Nimi: 'One who follows the *Bhāgavata* dharma will never err. He will not slip or fall down while running on the highways of samsāra, even if he is blindfolded.'⁶ The Master's teaching is the same: 'It is rather easy for a child to stumble if he holds his father's hand; but there can be no such fear if the father holds the child's hand.' The child who is in his father's arms, or whom the father holds by hand, has no fear. He may freely move about clapping his hands. But the child who holds his father's hands is always afraid. If he claps his hands unmindfully, he may fall. To follow Him, to totally surrender oneself placing our entire responsibility on Him—this idea we find expressly stated in the *Gospel*.

Harmony of Karma, Jñāna, and Bhakti

Even as Sri Ramakrishna spoke about devotion, he also stressed the path of knowledge. From the words of Sri Ramakrishna we can easily learn up to what point a Vedāntin

can reach using his intellect. The Master said: 'Vedānta says that Brahman manifests Itself where there is Existence, Light, and Love. Therefore nothing exists but Brahman.' The import of the Master's words is that the sum and substance of Vedānta is: He exists (*asti*), He self-revealing (*bhāti*), and He is dear to us (*priyam*). If we realize this then the task of Vedānta with its tons of books will be over. This is true, but this does not enable us to demonstrate our intellect. To show how great a pundit I am I have to project a *prima-facie* argument against my thesis and then draw a logical conclusion. Again the conclusion has to be reversed and placed as an argument and another conclusion must be arrived at. I must undo an established fact and re-establish the unfinished idea. If not, what sort of pundit am I? Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Why do you need all this? You need somehow to destroy the "I" in you. This is what a jñānī does. All troubles end when the ego dies. So destroy this "I" somehow or the other. Do this either through the path of knowledge, or through devotion or through karma—or by all these.' Sri Ramakrishna gives an example: 'The goldsmith is up and doing while melting gold. As long as the gold hasn't melted, he works the bellows with one hand, moves the fan with the other, and blows through a pipe with his mouth. But the moment the gold melts and is poured into the mould, he is relieved of all anxiety.' In the same way, when a person feels intense longing for God, he does whatever is possible within his means. He moves ahead desperately till the gold is melted, that is, till he attains Him. This is Sri Ramakrishna's plain and simple teaching. We find in the *Gospel* how wonderfully he harmonizes jñāna, bhakti, and karma through these words. That's an extraordinary harmony! If we had not seen this through the Master's eyes we would have been eternally bound to this world. Scholars have been discussing philosophy since time immemorial, but even now the controversy has not been resolved: Is He One or Many? Is He with Attributes (*saguna*) or Attributeless (*nirguna*)? Is He with form or without form? If He is with

form then how many hands does He have—four, ten, or a thousand? There's no end to such doubts! In the *Gospel* we find beautiful solutions to all these problems, presented in the most simple form and language so that all of us can understand clearly.

Nowadays we talk about universality. We claim that what is useful for all will have to be provided. It is difficult to find such universally effective teachings like those of Sri Ramakrishna. His teachings satisfy both the learned and the ignorant. They inspire all equally—bhakta, jñāni and karmī. They do not exclude the atheists either. If someone is an atheist and doubts the existence of God, the Master advises him or her to pray earnestly. If he does so, God will let him know whether He exists or not. So the Master does not disregard or exclude even an atheist.

We come across Sri Ramakrishna's message of fearlessness at every stage in the *Gospel*. He encourages us in so many ways and at all times! Though knowing our inadequacies and imperfections he does not spurn us; rather he shows us easy and simple ways to overcome such imperfections. Here is an instance: Once Swami Yogananda asked the Master how to overcome carnal desire. Sri Ramakrishna advised him: 'Go on repeating the name of Hari and it will vanish. Nothing more is necessary.' But Yogananda couldn't appreciate that advice at all. He thought: 'I see, he does not know any process and that is why he has prescribed to me something useless. Does lust vanish on repeating the name of Hari? So many people are doing it; why does it not vanish in them?' Then on a second thought he persuaded himself, 'Why don't I do what he told me and see what happens?' Thinking thus, he took the name of Hari with a concentrated mind. And as a matter of fact, soon after he began to experience the result mentioned by the Master.

There are several instances of variations in his teachings, depending upon the nature of the recipients. He taught what was useful to each individual. But he never taught anything

weird. To do some bizarre sādhanā that would announce one's extraordinariness was never what he taught. Rather he advised us to shun all kinds of abnormality or extraordinariness and remain simple. He himself set the example of a simple life. He had no matted hair, no ash on his body, no other external sign of a saint which would differentiate him from ordinary people—nothing of the kind. But those who went to him found that the more they went near him the more he eluded their grasp. The nearer they approached him the more they realized his greatness. This is what made him unique.

As Sri Ramakrishna himself was simple, his teachings are equally simple. He is drawing us near him through these simple teachings. He has made the way to attain God simple and within easy access. This is seen throughout the *Gospel*.

The Gospel and Its Teaching

When we intend to study a book we should know something about the book and its contents. It is natural to want to know its subject matter. What does the *Gospel* contain? The *Gospel* deals with God and how to realize Him, how to free ourselves from the fetters of this temporal world, from sufferings of this worldly life, and from ignorance which makes us go round and round through successive births and deaths. How to resolve the doubts that vitiate our minds and how to direct our minds towards God while living in this world and attending to all its duties so as to attain profound peace—all these are discussed here. We find all these in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. No matter what our personal inclination is—towards knowledge, devotion, or action—all of us shall receive guidance from the *Gospel*, and shall feel greatly inspired.

M., that is, Mahendranath Gupta, the chronicler of the *Gospel*, has quoted a verse from the *Bhāgavata* (10.31.9) while introducing the *Gospel*. We may as well discuss it here. The verse is:

*Tava kathāmrītam taptajīvanam
 kavibhirīditam kalmashāpaham,
 Śravanamangalam Śrīmadātātām
 bhuvī grinanti ye bhuridā janāḥ*

‘The nectar of Thy words revives the scorched spirit of human beings. They purify the sinner and are the life of the holy. To hear them is itself auspicious and peace generating. They are the real givers who spread Thy name far and wide.’

What is the nature of His nectar-like words? It is like water to a person who has been scorched by the miseries of the world and is almost dead on account of it. This nectar removes all his sufferings, and he is saved from the cycle of births and deaths. Kavi is one who has attained knowledge and has realized the essence of the scriptures. Such persons praise this *Gospel*. They always glorify this *Gospel* saying that it saves humanity from disaster and teaches us that a human being is not mortal. What are the other features of the *Gospel*? It removes all our impurities, sins, and imperfections. We have smeared ourselves with enough of the dirt of this worldly life. No one can claim to be untouched by the dirt of this world. How can we be free from this impurity? Perhaps, many of us may repent, ‘Alas! There is no way out of it.’ That is why the *Gospel* asserts that, indeed, there is a way. This *Gospel* is the remover of impurities. In the Purāṇas it is said that by drinking nectar one becomes immortal. But here the nectar need not even be drunk. Hearing alone brings about great good. One may think: It may be true that hearing it is beneficial, but shall I be drawn towards it? The reply is that it is so beautiful, and its words are so charming that it attracts our mind spontaneously. Further, it is not sparse that it may get quickly exhausted. It is limitless and easily available. It is like the sky that spreads everywhere and does not have to be searched for. Or it is like the air that fills up everything, and is found everywhere. This nectar (amrita) in the form of words (kathā) is limitless. It is within easy reach of everybody. Then

why do we not drink this *Kathāmrita*? It is because only those who have given much in charity and have accumulated merit owing to pious deeds (bhuridā janāh) can develop a taste for this nectar. They love to praise, sing and discuss about God. Some naturally develop a taste, and some do not. This can be attributed to the accumulated deeds of previous births. If a person has accumulated much merit from pious deeds of previous births then he or she develops a taste for it from childhood itself. Attachment for it will be inborn. However, if one does not have such accumulated merit, development may come after receiving blows from the world. Thus there are persons at different stages of development. But the *Gospel* is beneficial for all. Nor does its study and emulation entail much difficulty. If one can only develop a taste for it, then one can derive much pleasure from it.

In order to make it clear why he named the book *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* M. quoted this verse from the *Bhāgavata* at the beginning of the book. He who taught the world as Sri Rāmachandra again taught in various ways as Sri Krishna, the essence of whose teachings we find in the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata*. It is He once again who appeared as Sri Ramakrishna and delivered the *Gospel*, using language that can be easily understood by all. This may be the message M. wanted to convey by quoting the above verse.

REFERENCES

1. *Sa evāyam mayā te'dya yogah proktah purātanah.*
— *Gītā*, 4.3
2. *Svādu Svādu pade pade ...*
— *Bhāgavata*, 1.1.19
3. *Nāyamātmā pravachanena labhyo...*
— *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.3

4. *Nānudhyāyād bahunchabdān vācho vīglāpanam hi tat.*

—*Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.21

5. *Yam labdhvā chāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tatah.*

— *Gītā*, 6.22

6. *Yānāsthāya naro rājan na pramādyeta karhichit,*

Dhāvan nimīlya vā netre na skhalenna patediha.

— *Bhāgavata*, 11.2.35

CHAPTER 1

The Gospel (March 1882)

The Master and the Disciple

We shall read a little from the *Gospel* every day and try to understand it. We shall begin with the first chapter. Of course, one may start anywhere. For, 'At the beginning, at the end, or in the middle, it is Hari that is glorified everywhere,' says a Sanskrit couplet. But normally one starts from the beginning; it is but natural. In the 'Introduction' to the *Gospel*, M. briefly narrates the life-story of the Master in a beautiful way. We will not read that portion now. We shall also skip the wonderful description of the Kālī temple at Dakshineshwar, its gardens, etc., recorded in the first chapter. We shall begin from the story of how M. first met the Master and what he heard from him.

It should be noted that M. has not only recorded the words of the Master, but he has also presented in every chapter the place, and the circumstances under which Sri Ramakrishna spoke.

There is something of a mystery behind this. M. used to record the words of the Master very briefly in his diary. Indeed, the recording was so brief that it has no meaning to anybody else. He wrote just a few words, that was all. Before he started to write the *Gospel*, he used to meditate on the scene of the day related to those words. He would say later that while meditating, the total scene of each day under consideration would appear clearly before his eyes. He would start

writing when the entire scene would surface clearly in his mind.

That is why we shall find that there is some speciality in each word of the *Gospel*. It is not just a collection of the Master's statements arranged in proper order and placed before the public. M. has presented before us a total picture of each day as it was then. He mentions everything— where the Master is seated, in which direction he sits, who else is there in the room, and so on. Earlier he had narrated every detail of the Kālī temple. Thus, from the very beginning the readers of the *Gospel* can integrate the picture given here with their meditation on the Master and then try to understand his words. This is the unique feature of the *Gospel*.

M. recorded the words and sayings of the Master and recapitulated them so exactly in meditation, that it was as if he had just heard them. His idea was that those who would hear or read them later could feel in their meditation that the scene was just before them, and that they were hearing the words from the Master himself. If this method is followed, the words of the Master will not reach us divorced from his personality. Instead, they will reach us as glowing words influenced by his radiant personality. Each and every word will be living and vibrant, not abstract or impersonal. The statements will not appear abstract. Rather, we shall feel that the Master himself is speaking, and is speaking to people like us. If we discuss the *Gospel*, keeping such a picture before us and thinking about the Master, we shall draw immense benefit from the study. That is why M. chose to write in this way; He certainly did not do it to achieve any dramatic effect. He has presented the teachings before us as subjects for meditation.

One thing worth noting here is that M. did not go to Dakshineshwar with the specific intention to meet the Master. He had been to Barānagar, which then abounded in gardens. As he wandered from one garden to another, his relative Sidhu who was with him and who knew the area, said to him: 'There is a charming place on the bank of the Ganges. Would you like

to go there? A paramahansa lives there.' Drifting from one garden to another they reached the gardens of the Kālī temple at Dakshineswar. Thus, M. landed there as an act of Providence; it was not a planned visit. Nor did he go there to meet a saint.

When he went to the Master, M. found him speaking to others. In the *Gospel* he has made a passing reference to what was being said. Although he did not understand those words, he liked them anyway. Possibly he did not feel any strong attraction for the Master, for he thought, 'Let me see the place first; then I'll come back here and sit down.'

As he left the Master's room to see the gardens, the sound of conches, bells, drums, and cymbals of the vesper services was heard. After witnessing the vespers in all the temples he came back to the Master's room, but he found the door shut.

Empirical Knowledge and Divine Knowledge

Then M. and Sidhu met Brinde, the maidservant. M. asked her: 'Does he read many books?' Brinde said: 'Books? Oh, dear me, no! They're all on his tongue.' Brinde was a maidservant, and she had no formal education. But she had seen many great pundits and saints come to the Master. Many important personalities of the day and also a number of exalted sādhas visited him. She had heard their conversations, though she may not have been very attentive. Still she realized that everybody was charmed hearing the Master's words. She also knew that the Master never studied books. So she stated her natural conclusion: 'Books! They're all on his tongue.'

This appeared strange to M., because his idea was that to gain knowledge about spiritual matters, study was imperative. How else would one's store of knowledge be filled up? Therefore, he was surprised to hear that the Master did not study any books.

Later we shall see that a devotee by the name of Mahimacharan, who frequently visited Sri Ramakrishna, also

said: 'Work is certainly necessary. One must labour. Only then does he succeed. There is so much to read! The scriptures are endless!' The Master replied: 'How much of the scriptures can you read? What will you gain by mere reasoning?... One cannot get true feeling about God from the study of books!'

Ordinary people think that in order to attain spiritual knowledge it is essential to study many scriptures. Without such study how can one attain knowledge? Even in the case of empirical knowledge there is no certainty as to how much one can acquire without serious effort. And this is not empirical knowledge—it is knowledge of the Divine. It is described in the scriptures, and the realizations of saints and ascetics are also recorded in books. How then can one hope to gain knowledge without studying those books? Therefore, in order to realize God, extensive study is required. This is what ordinary people think. The same feeling was echoed by Mahimacharan: 'There is so much to read!'

Mahimacharan's room was filled with books. After seeing so many books, if someone hears that one has to study all of them, that person will instantly bid adieu and go away. He will think that God-realization is not for people like him!

After talking to Brinde, M. entered the Master's room. He did not find anyone else there, and he observed the state of the Master. What was his state? It was like the state of an angler who sits with a fishing rod; the fish is about to swallow the bait and the float is trembling. Sri Ramakrishna's state was exactly like that.

M. was born with an extraordinary faculty of observation. Indeed, his power of observation was astounding! Whenever he visited any place he would examine everything there in detail. He never looked at anything superficially, just on its surface. We have seen that whenever he visited Belur Math, M. would go to every room. He used to instruct the devotees who accompanied him: 'Look, everything must be observed. Does seeing the Math mean just seeing the campus? Whenever you come, observe everything, talk with monks, and look at the

way they live.' He himself used to enter every room. There may have been some books near somebody's bed. He would pick them up and see what books they were. We never saw anyone else observe things so minutely. It was his lifelong habit to look at things with a subtle eye. That is why whenever we find descriptions in the *Gospel*, we see how minutely he has recorded his observations.

The Natural State of the Master

When the Master was in an absorbed mood, he seemed to M. to be dwelling elsewhere. M. was yet to be acquainted with that ecstatic state of Sri Ramakrishna. Later on he would develop a deep understanding of it. Now he only saw the Master in an indrawn mood. Therefore he thought that, perhaps, the Master was not inclined to talk now; he might perform his evening prayers (*sandhyā*). So he said: 'Perhaps you want to perform your evening worship. In that case may we take your leave?' The Master replied: 'No—evening worship? No, it is not exactly that.' M. failed to realize the significance of the Master's words then. Later, he would. The Master would make him understand the purpose of *sandhyā*, how long one had to perform it, and when it need not be performed any more. M. would later learn all these things. Now he saw the ecstatic state of the Master. Even while looking at everything, his mind didn't appear to be dwelling on them. He compared this state with that of an angler. When the fish swallows the bait, nothing else matters. Can the angler then give his attention to anything else? The Master had no attention for anything else then. His state was like that of an angler. The smell of the bait had attracted the fish, and the fish had swallowed it.

Such an absorbed state of mind occurs only at a very exalted stage of *sādhana*, and not before. We had the good fortune of coming in personal contact with some of the disciples of the Master and his close associates. We observed

that at times they also appeared to be in a state of mind such as we had not seen anywhere else. Elsewhere we had met many great monks and famous ascetics. But we had not found such a state of mind in which the world is temporarily forgotten. This is, indeed, a very exalted state of *sādhana*. We are not speaking about the state of *samādhi*. That state is still far off. We are speaking about that state of mind when it fails to take cognizance of external objects, when it forgets the world, when the world fails to make any impact on it. The external world exists; there is some indistinct feeling of it, but it fails to affect the mind. In a song composed by Swami Vivekananda, we find that this very state of mind has been described as a prelude to the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*:

...In the great void of space floats shadow-like the image-universe.

In the void of mind involute, there floats the fleeting universe,

Rises and floats ...

The universe is like a shadow, that is, it has no form, no real existence. Because it is like a shadow, it does not leave any impression on the mind. It is, indeed, an extraordinary experience when the whole universe appears like a shadow! In such a state of mind a person 'lives in the body but does not abide in it' (*dehasthopi na dehasthah*). It is not the state of *samādhi*—that is, the sense organs have not ceased to function. The sense organs are functioning, but for whose sake they are functioning is not known. The sense organs carry the images of objects before the mind. The mind in its turn places them before the 'seer' or the knower. Now if the latter does not accept the objects presented, then whether the sense organs work or not is of little consequence. It is not that in such a state the mind is totally disconnected from the external world; it is linked to it—but the world has become like a shadow.

M. saw the Master in such a state. It is something worth thinking about, because we are not familiar with that state of

mind. In our daily life we come across instances when a person's mind gets concentrated on something and he becomes absent-minded. But in that case he can perceive and identify an object on which his mind is concentrated. For example, a person once informed us that he had started a business. His mind became so absorbed in that business that his response to other things was superficial. His mind was totally absorbed in the business, and the problems of the business held his mind fully captive. His friends used to say: 'We do not find any pleasure talking to you. Who knows where your mind is now? We keep on talking and you stare elsewhere.' We can understand such absent-mindedness. Human beings experience such a state when the mind does not accept external objects. But what's the situation here? What is that object which takes hold of the mind and does not allow one to perceive other objects? We are new to this subject. We can understand such concentration of mind. Concentration can be so intense that one may be totally oblivious of the outer world and the objects of the senses. We recall another instance in this regard. This was recounted by one of the students of Sir J. C. Bose. He himself was well established and was working in a very senior position in the Government. Once he went to meet Sir J. C. Bose. He could move about freely in Bose's house. He came to know that Sir Bose was on the terrace where there were some earthen pots with plants. The student went there and stood before him, but Sir J. C. Bose was totally unaware of it. He stood there for a fairly long time, but he did not feel like disturbing the meditative sage. After a long time Bose became aware of his surroundings: 'O, it's you! When did you come?' He replied: 'I came some time back.' 'Why didn't you call me?' The student didn't reply. We can understand such deep concentration—whether it is on plants, or on any mystery of the world, or it is the attention of worldly people in pursuit of earning money. But in the case of Sri Ramakrishna we do not comprehend what takes hold of the mind. It does not reveal itself to us. We shall find several such instances of Sri

Ramakrishna's state of trance in the *Gospel*. This state of mind is called the semiconscious state (*ardhabāhyadaśā*). M. met the Master in such an absorbed state of mind and he had only a few words with him. Perhaps at that time the Master could not bring down his mind to the ordinary plane for conversation.

Very often the Master would be immersed in such ecstatic states. At times his mind would be in such a lofty state that it was impossible for him to bring it down to the ordinary plane. We refer to one such incident. The Master had come to Balaram Bose's house at Bāghbazār. Many young devotees like Narendranath were there to see him. While discussing transcendental realization a reference was made to the microscope. Many fine particles and germs that would have otherwise remained invisible could be seen, it was said, with the help of this instrument. Hearing this, the Master's interest was aroused and he wished to see one or two things through it. Enquiries revealed that a friend of one of the devotees possessed such an instrument. He was a doctor who, having recently passed a medical examination with great distinction, was awarded the microscope as a prize by the Medical College. Word was sent and he came with his instrument. After adjusting it, he invited the Master to have a look. The Master got up and walked to the instrument but returned without looking through it. When everybody asked why, he said: 'My mind is now dwelling in such a lofty state that no matter how much I try, I cannot bring it down.' It was not possible then to bring his mind down to a plane in which he would be able to see things through the microscope.

Such was his mind! The natural tendency of his mind was to soar high towards the transcendental Reality. He had to forcibly keep it on a lower plane. Why? It was not for himself; it was for our sake. He wanted to show us the path to transcendental bliss. For this reason he even ignored the supreme bliss of *samādhi*. He prayed to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, don't make me unconscious. I want to talk to them.' Why did he feel the need to talk to us? He himself was

immersed in the blissful sea of the Self. He was 'rejoicing only in the Self', 'satisfied only with the Self', 'contented only in the Self' in the words of the scriptures. Yet it was he who was so anxious for our welfare that he prayed to the Mother: 'Mother, don't make me unconscious. I want to talk to them.'

And did he talk! That is why the *Gospel* is becoming popular throughout the world. It is as if he was forcing his mind away from its natural tendency to remain at the transcendental plane and keeping it down. He passed into samādhi every now and then, but he was annoyed that samādhi was preventing him from talking to the devotees. That blissful samādhi, for which sages struggle life after life and undertake intense sādhanā, came upon him again and again. But still he would ignore it and was instead disturbed: 'If I am to be immersed in samādhi, what's the use of my coming?'

The Master explained the situation with the help of a story: Three friends went for a walk. While strolling they saw a place enclosed by a high wall. Beautiful sounds of music and singing were coming from inside, and they felt like seeing what was going on there. One of them secured a ladder and climbed the wall. Whatever he saw inside made him so happy that he laughed and jumped inside. He could not even say to the other two what he had seen. The second friend also could not resist doing the same thing and jumped inside, laughing. The third friend climbed up and saw a mirthful fair within. As he saw it, his first reaction also was to enjoy the fair. But then he thought: 'If I go there, people here will never know that there's such a delightful place. Will it be fair to enjoy this alone?' Thinking thus, he controlled himself with much effort and came down the ladder. Then he went and told everyone he met: 'Hey, there's such a nice place, full of delight! Come, let us enjoy it!'

The Master's Philanthropy

The third friend in the story is the Master himself. He had not come to enjoy by himself. He came to open up the

coffers of limitless joy and distribute them to everybody. That is why he had to forsake even his own bliss of samādhi. We should ever keep in mind this remarkable aspect of the Master.

In *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*, several facets of the Master's life have been recorded after due analysis. One of the points made there is that each and every incident in Sri Ramakrishna's life was for the good of the world, to educate people. In order to understand this we should carefully study his life in all its subtle details. We may not be able to understand everything fully, but at least we can appreciate this much—that he who could have remained ever immersed in the bliss of samādhi, refused that joyous state for our sake. Not only that, he argued with the Divine Mother: 'Mother, don't make me unconscious. I want to talk with them.' He knew that our ignorance about God is limitless. We are either bogged down with ordinary worldly pleasures, or else despairing at our sorrows and sufferings. His heart fervently yearned to show us the way to go beyond the pleasures and pains of this worldly life. It was not his heart alone; he also trained his disciples so that they too would be equally anxious for the welfare of others. Narendranath wanted to remain immersed in samādhi, but the Master rebuked him: 'For shame! You're such a vast receptacle. How can you ask for such a thing? Instead of becoming like a giant pipal tree, your shade providing refuge to millions of people, you ask for your own liberation. This is indeed a very ignoble idea. No, my child, don't aim so low!'

The Master also said the same thing to Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother: 'The people of Calcutta are wriggling like worms in darkness. Look after them.'

His life was dedicated to us. He also inspired his disciples and those who came to assist him in his divine play to live for the benefit of the world (jagaddhitāya). He said: 'You have not come to this world to enjoy that limitless spiritual joy only for yourself. You have come to show others the path to that bliss.' This is the cardinal point of Sri Ramakrishna's life. He didn't

do anything in his life for himself; everything was directed for the benefit of the world. And indeed, what is this *doing*? His *doing* was to carry humanity beyond this world of misery; to make people become aware of the bliss of which they are ignorant, and not only that, he wanted to help them reach there. He said: 'I have done whatever is to be done. You don't have to work much. Come and follow the light.' Again on another occasion he said: 'The cooking is complete and the food has been served. Come and eat.' Like a deft housewife, he has completed the cooking. The food is served. All we have to do is to go there, sit down, and eat. The fire has been lit, so all we have to do is warm ourselves by the fire. It is as if he has arranged everything in advance according to the requirements of each person. Now he is extending the invitation: 'Come, one and all. Come and enjoy this delight.' It is like the third friend of the story. Not only has he called us, he is also guiding, inspiring, and energising us, and he has removed with his own hands all the barriers that stand on the way. He did not do this for a select few alone or only for his associates and disciples. He did it for everyone. We have already said that he trained his disciples in such a manner that they would help him fulfil his mission—the purpose of his life.

What was observed during his lifetime to be his work, has increased a millionfold since he gave up his gross body. We have only started to get some faint hints of the effect of the work he has been doing all over the world in his subtle form. Swamiji said: 'We have only got some hints of what will happen in time. We do not have the total picture before us.' Slowly it is becoming manifest, and we are able to see some blossoms, though very faintly. Seeing this, we are surprised. We are dumbfounded! It makes us think—one never knows what greatness will materialize in time!

CHAPTER 2

The Gospel (March 1882)

The Master and the Disciple

When Mahendranath Gupta, or M., was about to take leave of the Master after his first visit, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Come again'. M. was yet to develop a relationship with the Master. From his very first meeting, however, he felt that in spite of his simple dress and demeanour, like those of common people, all the Master's words and actions exuded extraordinariness.

It was about him that Brinde, the maidservant, had said: 'Books? Oh, dear no! They're all on his tongue.' That set M. thinking: How was such knowledge possible without studying books?

There is one more thing. It is small but, indeed, very significant. M. was thinking: 'How wonderful it is! I would like to see him again.' M. was unaware of the nature of the attraction he was feeling within himself.

Many intimate devotees of the Master felt this attraction about which we read in the *Gospel* and the *Great Master*. None of them had the strength to hold out against this irresistible attraction. M. was now feeling the same thing. He therefore thought: 'He himself said, "Come again." I shall come tomorrow or the day after.' Of course, even if Sri Ramakrishna would not have asked him to come again, M. could not have helped going there. It was such an irresistible attraction.

The next day. It was M.'s second visit to the Master. It was around eight o' clock in the morning. The Master was about to be shaved. Seeing M. he said: 'So you have come. That's good. Sit down here.' If an unknown person would sit in someone's presence at such a time, it would appear to be bad manners, at least in cultured circles. But the Master had no such inhibitions. He spoke to M. even as he was being shaved.

M. now describes what Sri Ramakrishna was wearing. He had put on a moleskin shawl and a pair of slippers on his feet. Moleskin is a kind of warm cloth. At Belur Math we were once shown a piece of that cloth.

The Master was smiling. He stammered a little while he spoke. Those who came in contact with the Master said that he used to stammer a little, or occasionally halted as he spoke, but that made his words even sweeter. He asked M. about his house, and where he was staying. Then he asked him: 'Well, how is Keshab now?'

Keshab and the Brāhmo Samāj

The Master could not possibly have known that M. was acquainted with Keshab Chandra Sen. Perhaps during those days it was impossible for an educated and enlightened person not to know Keshab. Keshab's superb oratory, his new spiritual dispensation, and the sound arguments in favour of his dispensation—all these cast a very deep and abiding influence on the modern, educated people of those days.

With his inner vision the Master could see M.'s heart, just like one can see everything inside an almirah through its glass panes. Thus the Master came to know that M. knew Keshab.

We shall hear later how the Master and Keshab used to regard one another. The Master was very fond of Keshab, and Keshab too held the Master in great veneration, despite the differences in their viewpoints.

The Master worshipped images, while the Brāhmo Samāj's principal movement was against idolatry. The Master followed

all the injunctions of the Eternal Religion, whereas the Brāhmo Samāj's essential principle was to choose and select from the teachings of various sects. But despite all the differences, both the Master and Keshab were wonderfully drawn to each other.

The Master, who never prayed for a worldly object all his life, had vowed to worship the Mother with green coconut and sugar on Keshab's recovery. It might not have been possible then to understand how the two were linked. But history testifies now that Keshab was a helper in the fulfilment of the Master's mission. It was through Keshab that the Master was introduced to the contemporary 'Young Bengal'. What is more, many of the monastic disciples were introduced to the Master through Keshab.

Many members of Keshab Sen's Brāhmo Samāj did not like the Master's intimacy with it. In fact, when the Master visited the Samāj prayer hall in search of Narendra one day and passed into samādhi there, a few members of the Samāj did not hesitate to put off the lights.

We recall these as facts of history—and the motive is never to reflect poorly on any community. The question of passing remarks does not arise at all, as the Master himself offered salutations specifically directed towards the 'Modern knowers of Brahman.' Even disregarding the objections of Narendranath he paid his obeisance at the altar of the Brāhmo Samāj saying: 'The place where the words of God are discussed is indeed sacred.' Anyway, the Master had either visualized through his inner vision or guessed with the help of his common sense that just as he knew Keshab, M. too had contacts with the Brāhmo Samāj.

Sri Ramakrishna—The Ideal for All

Thereafter the talks centred on Pratap's brother. He had desired to stay with the Master, but the latter rebuked him and sent him back to take care of his wife and children. In the same way, the Master had also taken Pratap Hazra to task for

neglecting his duty to his mother, wife, and children. Here many fail to understand how the Master, who was renunciation personified and who had repeatedly advised his monastic disciples to stay miles away from worldly life, could rebuke a person desirous of renouncing the world. When some of his devotees questioned him on the issue, he gave a very candid and unambiguous reply: 'Those who have married should not neglect their duties to the family. They should renounce mentally. But sannyāsīs are to practise renunciation both within and without.'

Here, some may think that by advising people to practise renunciation mentally the Master has, perhaps, diluted his ideal. But actually this is far from truth.

The Master did not come for the sake of a few monks alone. He is a preceptor (āchārya), a world teacher (jagadguru). His advice has to be universally effective. In whatever position in life people may be, they are to be raised from there and directed towards the path of the supreme goal. Then alone will the Master be considered an Avatāra. Then alone can one say that he has assumed a human form for the good of humanity. Whether monk or householder—he is everyone's ideal. All will see their individual ideals reflected in his life.

Thus, while he had accepted the householder's way of life on one hand, served his mother, and allowed his wife to live with him as his equal, he was, on the other hand, still the glowing image of renunciation for his sannyāsī disciples. The consummate ideal for both the monks and the householders in one—this is the unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna. The Upanishads say that by following the path of renunciation some may attain immortality (*tyāgenaike amritatvamānaśuh*). But this did not satisfy Swamiji, who asserted that by following the path of renunciation *alone* can immortality be attained (*tyāgenaikena amritatvamānaśuh*). There is no other way. Now it may give rise to the feeling that only the sannyāsīs have the right to immortality. The Master said: 'Why should it be so?' One has to understand what constitutes true renunciation.

True renunciation is mental and comes from the core of one's heart. If one has that, then one has truly renounced. Now it may be asked that in that case even the sannyāsīs may as well practise renunciation in their mind. Why should they renounce externally as well?

One must not forget that a monk's life is the ideal. For him renunciation has to be both internal as well as external. But then why does the Master not prescribe the same thing for householders also? Because for the latter's stage of life, the householder stage (grihasthāśrama), the ideal is mental renunciation. This is the ideal to be followed by him. Forgetting this tenet and disregarding the respective stages of life, if people try to embrace the ideals of a monk indiscriminately, then Buddhism shows where it would lead us to.

The Failings of Buddhism

In Buddhism such a great stress was laid on renunciation that everybody had the impression that there was no way left other than forsaking worldly life. Thus hundreds and thousands of people embraced sannyāsa. History testifies what happened thereafter.

Those who were by nature not fit for sannyāsa also embraced that way of life, following others blindly. Thereby they distorted the ideal, and degeneration followed. That is why the Master had duly cautioned us and so did Swamiji, that only the monastic life, regardless of the quality of the aspirants, is not the ideal. The householders are as much entitled to spiritual life as are the sannyāsīs.

Swamiji had examined the issue of monasticism and the householder's way of life in one of the chapters of his *Karma Yoga* and had concluded that through different paths human beings are reaching the supreme goal; the paths may be diverse but the goal is the same. The difference between the two paths notwithstanding, the goal is the same and both will reach the same goal. Only as they travel, the paths look different.

The Householder's Duty

Once a person called on Swami Saradananda and expressed his intention to renounce the world. We were present there and heard the conversation that followed. Swami Saradananda said: 'Well, my child, you have decided to renounce the world. But I am yet to do so. Can't you see how I have wrapped up so many clothes! Once I travelled in northern India with a single piece of cloth. Even in cold places I had but one cloth. Now, you see how many clothes I've put on. Where do you find renunciation in me?' It was then winter and he had put on some extra clothes. Besides, as he suffered from rheumatism he would normally keep his body well covered.

The idea is, so long as one is alive one has to meet some of the body's requirements to keep it healthy. Thus, we have a duty towards our own body. Similarly, we have duties towards the members of our families, our country, and the world. In spite of so many duties, we say we shall renounce; is it so easy? Can we then never be free from the bondage of duty? The Master also replied to that. He said, 'There is a way out. Only if somebody turns mad, then no rule applies to him.' The Lord says in the *Gītā*: 'That man who rejoices only in the Self and is satisfied with the Self, and is contented only in the Self, for him there is no duty to perform.'¹

So long as I am a human being and a member of society, there is no respite from worldly duties. If I am able to completely wipe away my individuality then I have no duty in this world.

Have all monks been able to completely wipe away their ego? So long as they do not attain this stage they too are not free from assigned duties. Who is there to declare boldly that he or she has completely effaced the 'I'? This assertion will itself be self-contradictory. Therefore, there is no respite from duty. Whether duties have been accepted by choice or have been assigned, one has to discharge them flawlessly and with

detachment. And one who is able to perform his duties flawlessly and dispassionately, will soon be released from bondage.

The final words of the Master discussed earlier were directed towards Pratap's brother. The essence of his statement is that we should never try to avoid our duties until we completely subdue the 'I' in us. That is why if one becomes mad for God, no injunction applies to him.

As we reach the end of the chapter, we should keep in mind that to behave like Pratap's brother does not befit us, because he was an escapist. He wanted to avoid his duties. That is why the Master advised: 'Do things with the conviction that everything belongs to Him. Try to see Him in everything in this world. One should try to think that one's household is His.' If you are not capable of doing that, then think of yourself as a maidservant working in a rich man's house. It is He who has posted you there with the assigned responsibilities. This is His gift to you and you should accept it. 'A human being achieves success by adoring Him through his own duties.'²

We should work, attending to our assigned duties and thus achieve supreme realization by His grace, because whatever we do is worship offered to Him. 'O Shambhu! Whatever I do is your worship, your adoration!'³

REFERENCES

1. *Yastvātmaratireva syādātmatriptascha mānavah
Ātmanyeva cha samtushtastasya kāryam na vidyate.*
— *Gītā*, 3.17
2. *Svakarmanā tamabhyarchya siddhim vindati mānavah.*
— *Gītā*, 18.46
3. *Yad yad karma karomi tatadakhilam Śambho tavārāadhanam.*
— *Śivamānasapujā*, 4

CHAPTER 3

The Gospel (March 1882)

The Master and the Disciples

Not much discussion took place on the first day of M.'s meeting with Sri Ramakrishna. Now we are discussing his second visit. The Master wanted to examine M. in some depth. As he heard that M. had already married and had children, the Master exclaimed to Ramlal, his nephew: 'Alas, he is married! Ah me! He even has children!' M. observed an element of regret in the Master's words and felt a little embarrassed.

We shall find in the *Gospel* that the Master did not make such enquiries with everybody. He made enquiries only with those who appeared to belong to his inner circle. Seeing M. for the first time, the Master understood that M. was to be an instrument in his special mission, and he wanted the instrument to be flawless. M. had married and had children; the burden of household duties lay on his shoulders. In such a situation his freedom was substantially curbed. That was why the Master expressed regret upon hearing that M. was married. It is not that one cannot pursue religion while leading a householder's life. But he wanted M. to be his exclusive instrument; not partly for himself and partly for M.'s household. The Master's words give us that impression. Of course, later on when M. wanted to withdraw from worldly life, the Master dissuaded him. We have seen that he advised many people against escaping from their duties. So long as one is free one may think freely, move according to his or her own

nature, and opt for whatever life suits him or her most. Just as the Master did not like one to enter the world without proper forethought, he equally disliked escaping from it, having once entered after due consideration. That was why he was forcing Hazra to go back home. In fact, Narendranath argued with the Master on behalf of Hazra and requested him not to force Hazra to return home. But Sri Ramakrishna would not listen. When one has a household, one must not neglect the duties pertaining to it. If, however, the Master heard about a marriage proposal of any of his chosen disciples whom he had been training to be a monastic, he would feel as if he had been struck on his head.

The Master wanted a person chosen as his instrument to be flawless, and his dedication should be total. Any distraction would make him an imperfect tool.

The Beginning of M.'s Training

The Master asked M.: 'Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under the power of avidyā?' M. had never heard such things—having spiritual attributes or being under the power of avidyā. He knew that the word vidyā meant book-knowledge and so he thought that the Master wanted to know whether his wife was literate or not. Normally we consider those who have studied much to be knowledgeable; conversely, those who have not done so are considered ignorant.

Keeping that in view, M. replied: 'She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant.' Evidently displeased, the Master said: 'And you are a man of knowledge!' M. learnt a new meaning of the word knowledge and ignorance from the Master. He now understood that 'to know God is knowledge and not to know Him, ignorance.' Thus M.'s training under the Master began.

The Master used sarcastic words on purpose, to crush M.'s vanity. It is because, as long as a man is seized with vanity no

advice can be effective. Such a person thinks: 'What advice shall I seek? Do I know less?' M. was highly educated by contemporary standards. He was a teacher. Could M. have ever thought that he would have to sit as a student at the feet of an illiterate brahmin? It was necessary for the Master to destroy his vanity. That was why he asked sarcastically: 'And you are a man of knowledge!' The words struck at M.'s vanity.

God with Form and without Form

The Master's next question was a significant one. He asked: 'Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?'

At first it may be difficult to understand the reason behind putting such a question. But viewed in some depth, the purpose behind the Master's question may be understood. In those days young people were greatly influenced by the Brāhmo Samāj. According to the principles of the Samāj, idolatry was a sign of total ignorance. So viewed from this angle we can make out why the Master put the question. The question set M. thinking: 'Can it be true that God is formless and with form at the same time? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form?' M. said that he had faith in the formless God. Hearing this the Master said: 'Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else is false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form.'

Sri Ramakrishna has said again and again that there cannot be any end to God's aspects. He is limitless, infinite. We should never for a moment imagine that God can be this much only and nothing else. It is better to be an atheist than to be dogmatic. There is the possibility that faith may dawn in an atheist at sometime, but it is difficult to efface the narrow ideas of a dogmatic person.

The Master's teaching began even with the first words he spoke to M. But M.'s problem was with the Master's statement: 'God has form, and again He is formless.' He had studied logic. Logic says that 'with form' and 'without form' are mutually contradictory terms. Now these two contradictory aspects cannot coexist in a single object. That is why the Master's statement made M. perplexed. He was wondering: 'Can a white liquid like milk be black?'

It is very clear that if an object is said to be white, it cannot be black. But, suppose we put black ink into it. Can we not make milk turn black by adding ink? Yes, we can. Thus, it is established that blackness is not its natural colour. That is, it is not its essential property. A different property is fused onto it. This, indeed, gives scope for debate amongst philosophers. If God is formless, then the aspect of form is imposed upon him, and hence it is false. If, however, God has form, then the conception of formlessness is false. Scores of philosophical treatises have been written on this issue, but till now the issue has not been resolved. And if the past is any guide to imagine the future, then it can as well be said that the problem will never be resolved. This is because, by using the intellect we are trying to realize the truth which lies beyond the realm of the intellect. Can it ever be possible? It is said in the scriptures: 'Do not try to understand the Truth by reasoning, as it lies beyond the realm of thought.' Whose words are these? These are the words of those who have reasoned as far as the process of reasoning could go and have reached the farthest stage where argument could lead them. Having explored all the avenues, they have arrived at the conclusion that one should not try to understand the ultimate Reality through reasoning. One can never succeed that way.

God Is Beyond All Reasoning

The Vedas repeatedly say that the activities of the human mind are limited; they can go to the barriers of secular

knowledge, and that is all. For example, I am the seer, and what I see or feel is the object of perception. The objects of perception are multifarious. Indian logic works amidst this variety. Why logic alone? Whatever we may know through science, either directly or indirectly, is based upon the knowledge gained by our five sense organs. All our scientific experiments are based upon the knowledge derived by our sense organs. Perhaps we invent something not visible to our naked eye or not audible to the ear. This too, however, would be an object of the senses—either directly or indirectly. Otherwise, science will not accept it. In the same manner we like to perceive even God with the help of knowledge derived through the five senses. Since we want to perceive God thus, we try to imagine Him. As He is not visible, we try to perceive Him through reasoning. Sometimes we say that this universe is created; therefore there has to be a Creator and God is that Creator. Now who has told us that the universe is created? No one has told us. But that is what we think. And whatever is created by a combination of elements must have some power behind it. So we name that power God. We may at best imagine that this power, or God, has combined various atoms, or things smaller than these, in various ways and through diverse methods to create this universe. There is no other proof than this.

This world is like a mammoth tree. According to Indian logic, the seed of that mammoth tree is He from whom the universe has been created. But can we possibly have a glimpse of the nature of the seed from the creation? In fact, we come across many conclusions about the nature of the seed. But as these conclusions are self-contradictory, they can never be true. And one doubts whether there is truth in any one of them at all. Where is the scope for indubitable knowledge about religion, or about God, in the field of debate and argumentation? Not to speak of the knowledge of God, which is far too distant, we are yet to have a clear understanding of our own self. We do not even know precisely what the 'I' means. Logic has failed to arrive at any certitude even with regard to this, what to speak of God.

Shall we stop all reasoning then? Judging the nature of each aspirant the Master would ask a select few to reason while forbidding others from doing so. He made M. swear thrice: 'Say, I will not reason any longer.' This is because the Master wanted M. to spread his ideas without changing or amplifying them. His task was to record without questioning what the Master said. When Tarak (later Swami Shivananda) once started noting down his words, the Master asked him to stop, saying: 'Look, that work is not for you.' He trained each one by making him worthy to take up the specific task to be assigned later on. That was why the Master asked M. to record his teachings without any changes and without applying his personal judgement. Otherwise, the inherent tendency of reasoning that lay dormant in M. would defeat the very purpose of his teachings. Therefore, M.'s sense of vanity had to be crushed, and that too, right at the beginning. This is one point. Yet another point: even though the co-existence of contradictory ideas may appear impossible to the human mind, it is not at all so for God. So when the Master showed a branch of a red hibiscus plant to Mathurnath Biswas, with blooming red and white flowers on the same stalk, the latter had to admit, 'He who makes laws can go beyond all laws if He so desires, at any time.' Thus we can never comprehend with our limited intellect the truth which transcends all arguments. Let alone convincing others, we can hardly convince ourselves. It becomes all the more difficult to convince intelligent persons.

We very often say that God can do anything and everything. But these are mere words. They are not from the heart. That is why we instantly react if anything happens contrary to our liking: 'O God! What have you done?' We mean to say that God should not have done this. What we say is not said after much thinking, or after examining things in depth. But each and every word of the Master was properly weighed. Otherwise, his words may give rise to many doubts. One of our senior monks would emphatically advise us that there should be no distortion, not even the slightest change in the Master's

words . We often take the liberty of changing Sri Ramakrishna's teachings in order to deliver them in a modern style or to make them suitable for mention in meetings and gatherings. For example while the Master said *kāminī-kāñchana* (woman and gold), we often replace it by the words *kām-kāñchana* (lust and gold). In this regard Swamiji used to say: 'Look, the Master's words are mantras. If we explore deeply we shall find a deeper significance to those mantras and the reason for his using them that way.' In order to avoid offending women we may replace the word *kāminī-kāñchan* with *kām-kāñchan*. But the Master never used those words in such an impersonal way. He used very concrete terms so that those words would instantly appear before us, as if personified. He used the word *kāminī* in such instances where the idea of desire arising in the mind had to be expressed, and certainly not to despise women. The Master knew: 'The Mother of the universe abides in all women.' Nonetheless, he said that there were differences in power and in degrees of its manifestation. In some cases She is the embodiment of knowledge (*paramā vidyā*) and leads to liberation. Again, elsewhere She is the force that binds one to the world.

Depending on the place and person the selfsame Energy (*Śakti*) manifests in two ways. Somewhere She creates bondage; elsewhere She releases from bondage. She bestows freedom from fear somewhere; elsewhere She destroys. These two ideas may appear contradictory to the human mind, but it is not so to Her. The *Bhāgavata* says, 'Though it is a contradiction for others to be all these, for Thee, Brahman and the Lord of all, it is not so.'¹ In the same way 'form' and 'formless' may appear to be contradictory states, but it is certainly not so to Him.

Different Schools of Vedānta

The Master says: 'Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form.' Normally any Vedāntin, whether belonging to Advaita, Dvaita, Viśishtādvaita, or any

other school, would not like to admit such a proposition. Advaitins say that the creator, the originator of the universe, called Īśvara, is in His essence without attributes (nirguna), formless (nirākāra), and devoid of any parts (niravayava). In the Upanishads, He is described in negative terms. For example: 'It is neither coarse nor fine, neither short nor long...neither shadow nor darkness.'² Again about Him the Upanishads also say: 'This Self...is possessed of all good desires, is possessed of all good smells, is possessed of all good essences ...'³ Despite the existence of such contradictory qualities in Him, the Śruti says that there is no contradiction in Brahman. Now, in their bid to resolve the problem, philosophers, with their limited understanding, have concluded that one aspect is true, while the other is a superimposition or false. So one group of philosophers say that multiplicity or the substantiveness that is perceived is false. He who transcends all these is the Truth. And all other adjectives, which the Master used to term multicoloured (rang-parang), are unreal. Another group asserts that such diversity is inherent in Him. Approach Him and you will understand. What can you make out by seeing something from a distance? From a distance the sun appears to be a fireball of energy. Go near and see and you will find a variety of colours in it. Just by having a glimpse from afar jnānīs think that they know everything. Thus, one group criticises the jnānīs. Jnānīs in their turn consider those who perceive diversification in the Divine as deluded. The followers of Advaita declare that they have come to a conclusion about Truth. And, indeed, what conclusion is it? They declare: 'These followers of duality fight amongst each other over trivial things, like whether God has four hands, or ten hands, and so on. We tell them that all their claims are false. Therefore, we do not have any misunderstanding with them. Because we know that all of them are deluded.' Indeed, what a beautiful conclusion! We cast aside all the rest as deluded and announce, 'We have the perfect solution,' perching ourselves on a high pulpit. The Dvaitins also claim to

have the solution in the same fashion. They say: 'God sent down Śankarāchārya on earth to create delusion by giving it the Advaita doctrine, for if this world was not ensnared by māyā all human beings would have freed themselves by chanting the name of Hari.'

Coming back to Sri Ramakrishna, he appears to say: 'What experience do you have of this for which you are trying to arrive at a conclusion?' The Master gives the example of Padmalochan. Once there arose a great controversy amongst the scholars as to who was greater, Śiva or Vishnu. When we were studying the Purāṇas the same question arose in our minds. Who is greater? In every work one or the other god is in trouble, or is confused, or has problems. So the problems are resolved by the use of force. This occurred many times. We find that in the past there were a number of gods, and the use of weapons would solve the issue as to who was the greatest amongst them. Each community had its own god. The god of the chief community would then become the greatest. This is how the position of the deities used to be established in those days.

Whatever that may be, in our story no solution to the problem 'Who is greater—Śiva or Vishnu?' could be found by the pundits. So the matter was referred to Padmalochan for a decision. Padmalochan said: 'None of my forefathers up to the fourteenth generation saw either Śiva or Vishnu. Therefore how can I say who is superior or who is inferior?' We also should have the courage to make such a statement. One has to be very clear in one's mind about this matter.

So when we say that God is either with form or without form, and that He cannot be 'with and without form' at the same time, we only display our lack of understanding.

Sri Ramakrishna and the Synthesis of Faiths

Perhaps we may now think that it is all madness. But before Sri Ramakrishna's advent these conflicts were very

much present. The world had not witnessed the spread of liberal ideas amongst the masses in such a manner before the Master came. Even where there was some talk of liberality, it was not without some limits. It was mixed with a bit of an obstacle and couched with some doubt. To quote from the *Śivamahimnah Stotra*: 'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.'⁴ But here also there is that reference to 'crooked or straight'. Nobody would say: 'My path is crooked and yours is straight.' Rather, they say: 'Yours is crooked and mine is straight.' But to the Master there was nothing crooked or straight. That is why he said: 'How is it that you have tuned to only one note?'

There is such variety and colourful manifestation in God; we must experience that. Perfect realization will be reached only when Dvaita and Advaita are in complete harmony with each other. That is why Sri Ramakrishna, the harbinger of harmony, says from the very beginning: 'He is with form and He is formless as well.' The Master gave the story of the chameleon. It is sometimes red, sometimes blue, sometimes yellow, and so on. Again there are times when it is simply colourless. The chameleon is understood only when all the forms are taken into account; otherwise our vision is partial or limited. And if we want to realize the infinite Truth with our limited understanding, the result will be what would be expected.

In order to realize the immutable Truth we have to widen our vision. If we fail to grasp the viewpoints of others, then we should tell ourselves that it is our own imperfection and not the inadequacy of others' ideas. It is not compromise, not even toleration. Swamiji said: 'Not toleration, but acceptance.' Here we admit that God has no limitations. He is all the various forms we can understand. Again He has such other forms that are beyond our understanding. Indeed, this is Sri Rama-

krishna's basic teaching which he imparted to M. at the outset. He taught him thus because he desired that M. should place his teachings before the world. May his message reach each and every home. May the bleak darkness of ignorance melt away. May the light of knowledge illuminate each and every heart. May the ambrosial message of his *Gospel* flow on in all directions.

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3. *Sarvakarmā, sarvakāmah, sarvagandhah, sarvarasah ...*
—*Chāndogya Upanishad*, 3.14.4
4. *Ruchīnām vaichitryād rijukutīlā nānāpathajushām,*
Nṛināmeko gamyastvamasi payasāmarnava iva.
— *Śiva Mahimnah Stotram*, 7

CHAPTER 4

The Gospel (March 1882)

The Master and the Disciple

On the first day of his visit M. did not talk much to Sri Ramakrishna. On his second visit, however, the Master asked him some questions. The topic continues from the third chapter.

M. said: 'One should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is not God.' To this Master reacted sharply: 'That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people—giving lectures and bringing others to the light.'

These words of Sri Ramakrishna are significant. He says that unless one has realized the Truth, his words do not carry any conviction and they turn out to be empty words. That is why the Master said: 'You Calcutta people only give lectures.' Of course, by 'Calcutta people' he meant those of his time who were educated in the Western style and who tried to teach others without ever understanding things themselves. We cry ourselves hoarse and argue on subjects about which we know nothing at all. As we slowly reach the depth of our knowledge we come to know its limitation.

The Usefulness of Image Worship

Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image. Doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked?... Even if the image is made of

clay, there is need for that sort of worship. God Himself has provided different forms of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.... The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children.' Even so, God knows which path is suitable for whom. Therefore, He has created these various ways for people to think of Him.

We cannot easily understand this, as we have absolutely no idea about God. We spout high-sounding philosophical jargon to camouflage our ignorance. Such empty sounds come all the more loudly from those who have no substance in them. But in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna we shall not come across a single word that is indistinct, unintelligible, or not useful to us.

While talking to Sri Ramakrishna, once Swamiji spoke of 'blind faith'. The Master asked: 'Are there two kinds of faith then—one with eyes, and the other blind?... Either say "faith" or say "knowledge".' Though Swamiji was very intelligent, he had to admit defeat before the Master.

God is Beyond Speech and Mind

We use so many high-sounding words to explain the nature of God. We say He is Consciousness itself; He is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (Satchidānanda). Someone may ask: 'What do you mean by Satchidānanda? We can at best disjoin the word to say, *sat*, *chit*, and *ānanda*. But what if someone still insists on knowing what do *sat*, *chit*, and *ānanda* mean? Then we cannot proceed further.

Our scriptures say: 'He is beyond speech and mind.' So the scriptures too do not tolerate such impudence in thinking that words are capable of expressing Him. Indeed, we may give any name to the One who is beyond mind and speech; but by that can we ever describe Him? No, we cannot. This is what we cannot understand at all. And the more we fail to

understand it, the more we argue. Maybe we say, *sat* means everlasting. But have we ever seen anything everlasting? No, we have not. So how can we have any idea of the existence of something which we haven't seen?

Philosophers say: What does *sat* mean? It means that It is not *asat* (non-existence). What does *asat* mean? *Asat* means non-existence, insubstantial. What does *chit* mean? It means It is not unmanifest. What does *ānanda* mean? It means that It is not non-blissful. The scriptures have also tried to explain in this manner: 'It is neither coarse nor fine, neither short nor long... neither shadow nor darkness.'¹ But do these kinds of expressions state what It is?

Yājñavalkya used some mysterious expressions while explaining the nature of Brahman: 'He is near, yet He is distant. He is in motion, yet He is motionless'. Then one of the sages said, 'It won't do if you describe Brahman in such an indirect manner. You must explain it in such a way that we may understand clearly; just as they say, "This is a cow" or "This is a horse", and the object is then known.' Then Yājñavalkya replied, 'You cannot see the seer of sight, hear the hearer of hearing, you cannot think the thinker of thought, you cannot know the knower of knowledge.'² How then could we know That? Whereas in spite of our ignorance we write scores of books on Him.

His profound erudition notwithstanding, Vidyasagar would never say anything about God. Some people questioned him, 'Sir, you are so learned; yet why do you not speak about God?' He replied, 'Look, I am afraid of being whipped.' He meant to say that to speak about an object without knowing it would invite upbraiding. His friends and companions, however, would not let Vidyasagar off. Finally, due to the persistent demands of his friends he wrote at the beginning of his book *Bodhodaya*: 'God is formless, His nature is consciousness.' We do not know how he helped the students by describing God as formless and of the nature of consciousness, but he certainly created confusion among the teachers.

Myriad Kinds of Worship and Worshippers

Statements not coming from the depth of realization are mere hollow words and only create confusion. The Master said: 'God Himself has provided different forms of worship.... The Lord has done so many things. Will He not show people the way to worship Him? Why should you get a headache over it? ...If they need to be taught then He will be the Teacher.' On another occasion he said: 'Suppose a man has several sons. The older boy addresses him distinctly as "Bābā" or "Pāpā", but the babies can at best call him "Bā" or "Pā". Now will the father be angry with those who address him in this indistinct way? He knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well.' Doesn't God know that through the worship of clay images He alone is being invoked?

In the *Bhāgavata* three types of worship are mentioned. Ordinary (prārambhika) is the type people normally perform. In the second phase, the aspirant reaches a higher stage through the practice of regular worship, and in the third stage he attains the goal. These three stages have been named: Beginner (pravartaka), Secondary (madhyama), and Perfect (uttama). But no stage is named Inferior (adhama). Who is at the beginners' stage? 'He who worships the Lord with devotion in images alone but shows no consideration to His devotees and other fellow-beings—he is the beginner, the lowest.'³

The beginner worships God only in the image. He has installed an image, which he decorates, serves, and offers food to with great devotion. Of course he does it with great respect. Such a devotee is called Ordinary (Prākṛita). He is ordinary because he has not yet been freed from the influence of Nature or of ignorance. Of course, it is difficult to say who amongst us is free after all.

About the second stage it is stated: 'He who has love for the Lord, friendship for his devotees, kindness to ignorant people, and indifference to his antagonists—he is at the second

stage.⁴ In this stage the devotee has developed love of God (prema) and is friendly with other devotees of God. He feels pity for those who are ignorant of Him, and ignores those who are malicious. At this stage a devotee does not look down upon anybody. He is even-minded towards one and all, and so he helps others without any exception. The reference to indifference (upekṣā) in the verse refers to his sense of disregard for the enmity of spiteful persons and it is not directed against any individual.

Who is the best devotee? 'He who sees the Ātman in all creatures as an adoration of the worshipful supreme Lord, and sees all creatures as established in the Lord, the soul of all, he is the best among the devotees.'⁵ Thus, the worship that started with an image of God slowly extends towards the devotees of God also. Later it extends farther and pervades the entire creation. It excludes none. The best devotee sees the Self that abides within himself in everything all around. By everything one does not mean living beings alone. It also includes inert matter.

About the characteristics of perfect devotion, the *Bhāgavata* states further: 'The sky, air, fire, water, earth, celestial luminaries, living beings, quarters, trees, rivers, oceans—in fact, all such features of nature should be recognized as the body of the Lord and greeted with salutations in a mood of devotion to Him.'⁶ The perfect devotee feels God's presence everywhere. He sees God Himself in everything. He realizes that just as the body and the embodied being are non-different, God and His creation too are non-different. These are the features of a perfect devotee. Going forward not through the path of reasoning but through the path of devotion, he reaches a stage where he does not see anything other than God. Unique indeed is such a devotee! Unique because to such a devotee nothing other than God exists, so he salutes everything around. His behaviour will also be attuned to this spirit. The respect he had towards the image of God will be so widened that he behaves with each and every

small thing in the same manner as he did with God's image. This is the nature of the perfect devotee.

Observing the characteristics of a perfect devotee, if we despise an image-worshipper, we shall not only close the path to our progress but we shall also not allow others to move further. If we are unwilling to put our feet on the first step because it is too low, will it ever be possible to reach the roof? This would be childish. A child does not feel happy with small things; he prefers to toddle around putting on his elder brother's or his father's shoes. He does not know that he is not big enough to wear those shoes. We too have the same childish disposition. We are drawn towards things which we cannot have, while we ignore those we can afford and which are useful to us. One cannot reach the last stage by one bound. If we want to go up we should do so step by step.

The Necessity of a Symbol

No one can conceive that which is beyond the senses without the help of a symbol. It may be a clay image, or a sound, or something else. A sound symbol is also nothing but a symbol. The symbol itself is not the object to be attained, but to attain the object we have to seek the help of the symbol. Thus, what we call an inferior method of worship is not to be despised after all. This is because that form of worship also helps us to progress along the spiritual path.

Many Paths but One Goal

When we do not intend to progress along our own path we have plenty of time to find fault with that of others. If, however, we are sure about our way and are really earnest about our journey ahead, then we hardly have any time to look at others' ways, far less to criticise. It is because our mind is concentrated on the one thought as to how to make progress in our own path. The Master asked, 'Have you tried all the paths

yourself?' Far from trying all the paths, we have not even examined the path we have chosen for ourselves. Often we say about some paths, 'Those are kindergarten methods.' We are grown-ups and don't care to busy ourselves with the toys of children. Good enough! What are we interested in then? We may talk glibly, 'He is Absolute, He is Pure, and so on!' But we do not know what 'Absolute' is, nor do we understand what 'Pure' is. This is the position of ordinary people. That is why the Master said: 'Why should you get a headache over it?... God Himself has provided different forms of worship. He who is the Lord of the universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.' So if we follow our chosen path we shall slowly come to know of everything else. From his own experience Sri Ramakrishna has taught this time-tested truth that God can be reached through all the paths and that He is our only goal. The Master does not say this because the scriptures say so, nor because he has heard about it. He says so because he realized it through experimentation.

Just as 'the ocean is the only home of all waters,' He is the support of all beings. 'In Him jīvas live, and in Him they dissolve.' This is as true of all living beings as it is of all religions. Sri Ramakrishna's experience after having practised all religions is that, though 'diverse may be the courses, all the paths reach the same goal in the end!'

This is the fundamental principle of Sri Ramakrishna's synthesis of all religions. Somebody asked: 'What's this synthesis of all religions? Are religions separate? Religion is but one.' It is indeed nice to hear such an idea in lectures; but what does one mean by 'all religions are one'? If we ask the followers of different faiths, they will reply: 'How can that be? Your religion is not mine, nor is my religion yours.'

We are born with different natures and our backgrounds are also different. We have been brought up in different ways from our childhood and our understanding follows different and distinct ideologies. We cannot deny these differences

amongst ourselves. However, despite all the differences, it can never be said that by traversing through varied paths we will not reach the ultimate goal, that stage which is beyond all differences. It is like a circle having different radii to the centre from its circumference. When they are near the circumference, the distance between different radii, though directed towards the centre, is quite considerable. The more they come towards the centre, the closer they come to each other. Ultimately, as they converge at the centre, all differences are gone. Of course, this is only an analogy. Religious matters cannot be explained in such a simplistic way. This is because no group has complete knowledge of what we call the centre. We have different angles of vision, and we are guided by our own perceptions of the distance to be covered to reach the goal. This is why it is hard for us to share the conviction that all of us shall reach the same goal. In fact, we don't even believe the person who speaks about such an ideal.

Lately someone told one of the monks at our London centre: 'Sri Ramakrishna's practice of Christianity and Islam was merely his imagination.' That is to say, did Sri Ramakrishna totally accept the traditions of these faiths? Now tradition comprises some primary elements and also some secondary elements, or, frills. Therefore, it is irrelevant to ask whether Sri Ramakrishna was baptised, or whether he believed in 'original sin' while practising Christianity, and so on. It should be seen whether or not he had proceeded with faith in the fundamentals of the respective religions, leaving aside the secondary details, or rituals.

This reminds me of an incident. An Australian had just arrived at Belur Math after becoming a monk. He was close to me. One day while demonstrating his newly acquired skill of eating food with his fingers, he placed the plate before me, partook a little of the food from the plate, and then left, carrying the plate. Someone who stood beside us asked me: 'How is it that you haven't told him that the place is now unclean?' I told him: 'You see, it's true that the place is

unclean. But he will not understand this as he has no preconception about defilement owing to eating'. He insisted, 'That doesn't matter. As he is learning to practise Hindu ways, this should have been explained to him.' I remember having said, 'Look, sir, if this is Hinduism, then he can help himself without this brand of Hinduism.' Here the idea is that we often regard secondary details as important and thus make a mockery of things. Swamiji used to say: 'Our time is wasted in deciding whether to hold the glass in the right hand or in the left.' Very often we forget that such things are non-essential and have no relationship to the attainment of God. Thus, when we say that Sri Ramakrishna practised the disciplines of other religions, we mean that he followed the essentials of those disciplines. This we can assert from our knowledge of his sayings, actions, nature, and disposition.

Whenever the Master took up anything, he followed it in minute detail. There is justification in examining things in such detail. Pretending to be rational we often try to shed many things we consider secondary. We say, 'The corn is important but the chaff is secondary; throw away the chaff and retain the corn.' But Sri Ramakrishna has warned us against such an attitude, and says that everything should be taken into consideration. If the chaff is discarded then the seed will not live. One cannot expect a sapling by sowing rice. One has to sow the seed. All that which has come down to us as tradition is not useless. But there should not be obstinacy regarding insignificant details. Let us not confound people by making them think that such details are essential parts of religion. We may explain to them the fundamental principles and also follow them ourselves. Then everything will be set right slowly. When we finally reach the goal ourselves, we shall understand the truth through experience. The Master believed in this method. It is not that he conducted experiments like a scientist. We often say that Sri Ramakrishna's experiments were scientific. No, it was not like that. His method was like this: He prayed to the Divine Mother to show him how the

devotees of other faiths would worship Her. He had taken it for granted that the devotees of other faiths also realized his Mother. He wished to know their methods of sādhanā and experience them himself. Therefore, the Divine Mother arranged and brought everything for him at the right time and made him realize the truths. Thereafter, firmly established on the ground of personal realization, he said that all paths led to the same God. The truth, 'As many faiths, so many paths' was thus demonstrated in his life.

A question may be raised: Did he try all the faiths himself? No, he did not. There is something called a 'sample survey'. The Master's method was very much like that. He practised some of the faiths and disciplines that were prevalent during his time. Besides, he was endowed with superhuman perception to which the truths revealed themselves spontaneously. He did not have to probe or analyse to reach conclusions. The veil of ignorance before his pure mind was lifted away and he visualized that 'the goal of all human beings is the same in spite of differences.' He saw through diverse ways that the aspirants saw his Divine Mother alone through all possible avenues!

She who creates, preserves, and destroys was called Mother by him. Let us not debate over yet another issue: whether he was a worshipper of Kālī, or Vishnu, or, whether he was an Advaitin, or a Viśistādvaitin. Not only was he all these but he was something more also. Swamiji summed up all this in one word while saluting him: 'He is the embodiment of all faiths' (Sarvadharmasvarupa). Why is he the embodiment of all faiths? It is because, having attained God through different faiths, he has become the very embodiment of religion. The religion that was, that is, and that which will come in the future—all these blossomed in him whenever such a manifestation was needed. But this revelation did not take place at all times, before everyone.

A Christian met him and perceived that Lord Jesus was manifest in him. He declared: 'You are Lord Jesus!' Many

others said the same thing. Such was the truth revealed, such was the power created, and such was the light in him that in whichever direction we may look with its help, there darkness disappears. If we look at Sri Ramakrishna's synthesis of religions in this light, then only may we comprehend it to some extent.

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Na tadbhakteshu chānyeshu sa bhaktah prākṛitah smritah.*
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Premamaitrikripopekṣā yah karoti sa madhyamah.*
—*Bhāgavata*, 11.2.46
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Bhūtāni bhagavatyātmannyesha bhāgavatottomah.*
—*Bhāgavata*, 11.2.45
6. *Kham vāyūmagṇim salilam mahīm cha
jyotīnshi sattvāni diśo drumādīn,
Saritsamudrānścha hareh śarīram
yatkincha bhutam pranamedananyah.*
—*Bhāgavata*, 11.2.41

CHAPTER 5

The Gospel (March 1882)

Teaching Different Aspirants

In the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, just as there are instructions on higher ideals, there are also useful tips for day-to-day practical affairs.

The Master has come for the welfare of all humanity. Can his teachings be meant for only a limited number of persons? If so, then the vast majority of people will be left out of the purview of his teachings. That is why, while he advises some to endure everything silently, he advises householders to 'hiss' if circumstances so warrant.

Narrating the tale of the brahmachārī and the snake he points out that in order to protect oneself it may be necessary to 'hiss' sometimes. But for the all-renouncing monk there is a different code of conduct. He should not even 'hiss' to protect himself. Indeed, his code of conduct is extremely rigorous. But this act of 'hissing' does not mean striking a compromise with the ideal. It is necessary to marginally adjust the ideal so as to make it compatible with ordinary life. Thus it becomes effective, though slowly, in the lives of ordinary people. Very often the Master used to teach his would-be monastic disciples about renunciation. But whenever it struck him that his audience included many who were unable to follow such exalted ideals of renunciation, he would hasten to add: 'We have said something amongst ourselves; accept it after shedding its head and tail.' That is, he meant that they may

accept to the extent that they are capable of. Such an identification of qualified aspirants is the task of the preceptor. It is not that everybody can have the same ideal, and therefore not everybody can accept the same set of teachings. Hence our scriptures have different types of ideals; one particular set of ideals is not prescribed for all. Whenever there was a departure from this principle it brought about baneful consequences for society. During the days when Buddhism spread everywhere, the ideal of renunciation was so strongly emphasized that even ordinary people who were not fit for sannyāsa tried to embrace monastic life in increasing numbers. As a result of falling into the hands of incompetent people, the exalted ideal of renunciation soon became corrupt. But we find a different picture in the age of the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* provides different teachings to different types of aspirants, born with different inclinations. Of course, certain common rules may be useful for everybody. But these common rules cannot be given rigid and irrevocable form so as to make them guidelines to run a society. Whenever there is any departure, the ideal gets corrupted.

Sri Ramakrishna and the Path for Today

This fall from the ideal has happened not once, but many times. That is why God has to descend and repeat the same ideas in renewed forms. Thus He asserts in the *Gītā*: 'That very ancient Yoga has been taught to you by Me today.'¹ The Master said many times that 'religion is eternal'. Generally there may be nothing new to offer; but the same eternal truth is presented in new forms. The ancient teachings are marginally adapted to suit the changed social circumstances; but the essential truths remain unchanged. Even as God is eternal, the paths to reach him are also eternal. However, limitless are the varieties of these paths. When God incarnates He makes these truths and paths compatible with the requirements of the particular age. Thus, His instructions have two aspects. The

first is to revitalize and rejuvenate the eternal truths, and the other is to mould them to make them suitable to the new ages. We find in the life of Sri Ramakrishna also that he has presented the basic truths of religion before everybody in a revitalized form, simple and easily understandable to all. Just by seeing him people's doubts about the existence of God were dispelled, and the fundamental purpose of human life would become clear to them. Not only that, he has made religion practical for the modern age. He said: 'For the Kaliyuga the path of devotion described by Nārada is the best. Where can the people find time now to perform their duties according to the scriptural injunctions? ...I say that it will be enough for them to repeat the Gāyatrī alone... The Sandhyā merges into Gāyatrī, the Gāyatrī in Om, and Om into samādhi.'

As regards repeating God's name, he teaches: '... you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest.' Let a person take God's name the way it suits him. It may be in the forest, or in the seclusion of one's home, or deep in one's mind. The Master has repeatedly emphasized the need for going into solitude now and then. If that is not possible for someone, then there is also a way out. Let the person take God's name in a secluded corner. If that is not possible either, let him take God's name mentally.

Service to Jīvas as Worship of God

Many teachings of the Master make religion suitable for the modern age. One statement, which was emphatically reiterated by Swamiji, is that it is not compassion that is needed, but service to all beings, recognizing them as the manifestations of God. When one shows compassion, one feels superior to the object of compassion. That is why the Master once said: 'Compassion for creatures! You fool!... Who are you to show compassion? No, no, it is not compassion for others, but rather service to man, recognizing him as the manifestation of God!' Hearing this Swamiji said: 'What a strange

light I have discovered in those wonderful words of the Master.... Well, if the Lord wills, the day will come when I shall proclaim this grand truth before the world at large.'

Though Swamiji drew the basic inspiration from the words of the Master, at that time he had not surrendered himself fully; rather, he occasionally protested. Slowly, however, he understood that it was beyond his power to undo the words of the Master. Finally he had to declare: 'This time I had to sell my head at the feet of this crazy Brahmin!' Swamiji's mission of service of God in human beings had its birth here. And indeed, this is one of the glowing examples of the Master's teachings being suited to the modern age. In fact, we shall come across many such instances in his life and sayings. As days go by people will draw more and more ideas from them.

Advice according to Qualification

In the story of the brahmachārī and the snake, the brahmachārī asks the snake not to bite, but does not advise it to stop hissing. He tells it not to hurt anyone, but certainly it should not put up with all injustice without protest or demur.

Instructions are different according to the qualifications of the taught. Once the Master heard that while coming to Dakshineswar on a boat his disciple Niranjan (later Swami Niranjanananda) was about to sink the boat because the passengers were abusing him. The Master scolded him: 'What is this? People may speak many improper things. Do you have to sink the boat for that?' We get just the opposite picture in the life of Swami Yogananda. In a similar situation, while on his way by boat, Yogananda heard people slandering Sri Ramakrishna. He did not utter a single word in protest. When the Master heard this he scolded him for enduring such insults to the guru without protest. This is another method of instruction. How different were his instructions! One day the Master noticed a cockroach in the box in which his clothes

were kept. He asked one of his disciples to take the insect outside the room and kill it. But the disciple was soft-hearted. He caught the cockroach and went out, but he set it free instead of killing it. Hearing this the Master reprimanded him. The disciple was surprised. He had thought that the Master would be highly pleased with him for his great show of compassion. Instead, the reaction was just the opposite! The reason for the Master's reproach was: if the disciples work according to their own whims instead of obeying his instructions, serious dangers will await them in their spiritual lives.

Bound Souls and the Way to Liberation

Coming back to the *Gospel*, the Master next spoke about different kinds of human beings. There are four classes—bound souls (those bound by the fetters of the world), the seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free. Bound souls are ever in bondage and are even happy in their bondage. The seekers after liberation struggle to free themselves from bondage. Some of them become successful in this; then they are said to be liberated. But the ever-free are never entrapped in the Divine Mother's net of illusion.

As regards bound souls the Master says: 'Bound souls are tied to the world by the fetters of "woman and gold". They are bound hand and foot.... When time hangs heavy on their hands they perhaps start playing cards.' All were stunned! It is only natural that the listeners were stunned. This is because all of them had seen that scene so often. But they hadn't thought about it the way the Master had. If we look at those who have retired from active life we shall realize this. What a vivid and true picture the Master draws! Where each moment is of such value, how frantically we try to fritter away the time! How difficult it is to realize the goal of life within the limitations of time. When we should be gripped by anxiety and driven by acute yearning, we wonder

instead how to spend the time. If only we would realize that these fetters are truly fetters, then this bondage would become unbearable. When we have no sense of bondage at all, how can we expect to induce ourselves to shed it? On the contrary, if anybody shows us the way to liberation, we ask, 'What happiness is there in liberation?' Some days ago there was a talk about a poem: 'Amidst a thousand bondages I shall secure the taste of liberation!' Why 'amidst a thousand bondages'? Is it because we are deeply attracted by them? It is wonderful to aspire for the 'taste of liberation'. But why more fetters?

We often fancy that we will go to heaven after death. There we will be united with our deceased relatives—it will be a sort of family reunion! None of our enemies will be present there; only those whom we love will be there. The exclusive claim of heaven shall be ours: we, who obey the scriptures, fear God, and observe the rituals, no matter what these rituals are. While living we try to enjoy this world, and we indulge in golden dreams of an imaginary world beyond death where the usual fetters of the world are all very much there. This is the greatest example of a *jiva* in bondage. It is no wonder that we often brood over the fact that we are but worldly people, bound souls, and we wonder if we have any chance of deliverance, and so on.

But the Master never approved of such despondency. That is why he firmly said: 'Certainly there is a way! Let him seek the company of holy men. Let him from time to time leave his family and go into solitude, in order to meditate upon the Lord. Let him practise discrimination. Let him pray earnestly to the Divine Mother, saying, "O Mother, grant me devotion and faith."' None of the above teachings is so difficult that ordinary people cannot follow it. We understand the difficulty of our situation, but at the same time we should have faith that there is a way out of this bondage. And indeed, it is well within our reach. Otherwise, worldly persons will be lost in the abyss of despair.

Buddhism and the Views of the Gītā

The main tenets of Buddhism are the four noble truths. The first of them is: 'Everything is transitory, and transient things are full of suffering.' Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā*: 'Having come to this ephemeral and joyless world devote yourself to Me.'² Now let us compare this with the statements of Buddha. He says: 'kshanika' (transient), whereas Sri Krishna says 'anitya' (ephemeral). Buddha says: everything is full of suffering—'sarvam dukham'. Sri Krishna says everything is 'asukham' (miserable). There is no difference in their teachings. This world is impermanent, ever-changing, and this transitory life is full of suffering.

Now, what is the way out of this suffering? The Master said: 'There is certainly a way out.' Buddha also said, 'There is a path to the cessation of suffering, and it is in the hands of human beings alone.' If, however, anyone fails to follow the path, then that person alone is to be blamed. The expression 'the worldly' (*samsāri*) does not mean just those who have married. *Samsarati iti samsārah*—that is, those who are passing through the cycle of births and deaths are 'the worldly'. And those who make no efforts to free themselves from this cycle of birth and death are bound souls in the true sense of the term. But the Master says that even such people have the means of deliverance. The means are: the company of holy men, meditation on God, discrimination, and prayer. The first requirement is the company of a holy man—that is, the company of one who has not fallen into the trap of worldliness. This is how the Buddha's dispassion was aroused. Seeing the different aspects of life, like disease, old age, and death, Siddhārtha wondered: 'Where is happiness in life?' It was then that he saw a monk—a blissful person. He himself set out in search of the source of this bliss and finally discovered the path to the cessation of suffering. He discovered the four noble truths. Hence, the company of holy men is necessary. A saint is the source of an incessant flow of bliss. Anyone coming

in contact with him also gets a touch of it in his life. It is not that Buddha was so naive that he had never heard about disease, old age, and death. But when he met them face to face his reaction was different. In the same way we all know that life is fleeting and is full of suffering. However, the company of holy men reminds us of another world which is full of bliss, beyond the humdrum routine life; and that is the life we should truly aspire for. So it is imperative to have the company of holy men occasionally. The word 'occasionally' is used because a casual meeting once or twice is not adequate to remove the influence from our lives of deep-rooted worldly attractions. That is why we should have the company of holy men often. Such repeated visits create an awareness in the mind and awaken a new consciousness in us. We shall then be able to realize the stark reality that we are dangerously asleep even though we appear to be wide awake. Then an intense longing will come to seek a bright and blissful world.

REFERENCES

1. *Sa evāyam mayā te'dya proktah purātanah.*

— *Gītā*, 4.3

2. *Anityam asukham lokam imam prāpya bhajasva Mām.*

— *Gītā*, 9.33

CHAPTER 6

The Gospel (March 6, 1882)

The Master's Deep Spiritual Moods

Sri Ramakrishna was speaking about God to a few devotees in his room at Dakshineshwar. It was M.'s fourth visit to the Master. M. had already developed some familiarity with him, but he was yet to be familiar with all his various moods. He had seen the Master immersed in deep samādhi. He had also seen him absorbed in discussions about God with the devotees, explaining abstruse truths in simple language. That was one scene. M. also found the Master having great fun with young boys and behaving with them as if he was of the same age. This was just the opposite scene. It set M. wondering as to whether he was the same person he had met on three earlier occasions. Many of us think that one who talks about spiritual matters should always be grave, deeply thoughtful, and have such an air of seriousness about him that it will be difficult for most people to go near him.

Indeed, this is the general idea everywhere about saints. Any departure from this makes people think, 'What's this again?' Finding Swamiji joking with people like a common man, a surprised devotee enquired about it, to which Swamiji replied: 'We are the children of bliss. Why should we be morose and gloomy?' Swamiji could say so because he was the Vivekananda that the Master trained.

Even when the Master remained in the normal plane, he was always blissful. His bliss flowed on all sides, as it were.

After coming down to the normal plane he would have fun, perhaps over trifling matters, just as M. found him here having fun with the young boys in a light mood. We have a similar instance in the life of Swami Brahmananda. Brahmanandaji was staying at Balaram Bose's house then. Wanting to show a great saint to his friend, a devotee had gone there. But when they arrived there, they found that Brahmanandaji was joking and having fun with some children. The devotee thought: 'Alas! He is not discussing anything spiritual at all. Lord knows what my friend must be thinking.' After a while, as they were about to leave, Maharaj smiled and said: 'Sometimes we talk about many good things also!' On the way back the devotee thought that his friend must have been greatly disappointed. But his friend said: 'You see, I do not know what great saints experience in their spiritual life. But today I have seen something new. I saw a person brimming over with happiness!' Brahmanandaji alone knows how he won over the heart of the friend without giving even a single word of advice.

Great saints do not always travel along the path we think they should. They have their own ways. Observing the Master in his lighter moods, who could say that he was the same person who had talked about so many spiritual things. At times he even crossed the limits of usual standards while cutting naughty jokes for the young men. The Master used to say with a smile: 'I don't give the youngsters a pure vegetarian diet: now and then I give them a little water smelling of fish. Otherwise why should they come?' Well, the Master himself was the physician, and he knew well what to give and what not to, and to what extent indulgence is permissible. It is difficult for ordinary people to comprehend this. Seeing him in such a mood, M. was greatly surprised.

Sri Ramakrishna and His Chosen Few

Looking at M., the Master cried out: 'There! He has come again!' The Master knew who belonged to his inner circle.

There was no exception in case of M. either. But the Master used to put them through various tests. He asked M.: 'What do you think of me? I mean, what do you make of me?' He used to put such questions to those belonging to his inner circle to ascertain to what extent they were able to understand him. At times, seeing someone, he would literally jump. In this regard he himself said: 'Do you know how it is? It's like a man who is thrilled when he suddenly meets a near relative after a long time. I feel the same way when I see one of my intimate associates, whom I have not seen earlier. It is his first visit, and he doesn't know me. I too have no knowledge of him. Seeing him suddenly I jump in surprise.'

We know about his feelings only because he himself disclosed them. Otherwise there would be no way of knowing. He did not always disclose his relationship with his new devotees. Maybe later on he would mention it in some other context. In the case of M. also he did not talk about his relationship with him during his first few visits. Till now he has not told M. that he belongs to his inner circle, or, that he has come to assist him in his work.

Of course, the case of Swamiji was altogether different. The Master had waited for him for a long time, so he just couldn't contain himself the moment he saw him. He immediately accepted him openly. But Swamiji could hardly understand anything. The Master was fully conscious of his relationship with his intimate associates, but he wanted that those who were thus related to him should also know about it. As Sri Krishna says to Arjuna: 'O Arjuna, many lives of Mine have passed, and so have many of yours. I know them all, (but) you know them not, O scorcher of enemies.'¹

With the expressions 'You' and 'Mine' He revealed, 'You came many times before with me. I know about these births, but you do not.' The Master identified his associates in a similar manner. He understood that they were not born like others, due to their previous karma. They appeared as companions of God in his divine mission to help the world.

The Master said: 'They are satisfied if they can know two things: first, who I am, and second, who they are and what their relationship with me is.' It would be adequate for them to know that their birth and mission in life were divinely ordained. They need not know anything else. That he had them undergo some spiritual disciplines was just to reveal one thing to them: They should know that he who was before them was God himself. He had assumed a human form for the welfare of the world, and they were born specially to assist him in his mission.

Now we find the scene changed. All fun and laughter have totally stopped. The conversation has drifted to Hanumān, the great devotee of Rāma. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Just imagine Hanumān's state of mind. He didn't care for money, honour, creature comforts, or anything else. He longed only for God. When he was running away with the heavenly weapon hidden in the crystal pillar, Mandodari began to tempt him with various fruits so that he might come down and drop the weapon. But he couldn't be tricked so easily.' Hanumān had come for Rāma's work. He did not know anything other than Rāma. The Master went into samādhi while singing the song (which Hanumān had sung when Mandodari tried to distract him). Once again he became still. M. saw this and wondered: 'Is this the same person who was behaving like a child a few minutes before?'

Training M. as an Instrument

Two completely different pictures. Two distinct states. M. was astonished. The Master now asked M. and Swamiji to debate in English. But M. said that it was impossible to argue anymore before the Master. Once the Master made M. swear: 'Promise that you won't reason any more.' He had made him swear three times, because that was not the path ordained for M. He was to present without the least change whatever he had seen and heard from the Master. No change, even

marginal, was permitted. Indeed, he would examine M. too. He would enquire: 'Well, what did I say in that context?' M. would then answer, the Master would point out: 'No, that was not it. I said this.' Thus, he took care to correct M., so that his sayings could be presented properly. That was why the Master had M. swear three times and he did not reason anymore after that.

Once the Master asked his disciple Subodh to visit M. Subodh thought that as M. was a householder, what spiritual advice could he get from him? Perhaps he had a shade of vanity, as he intended to lead the life of renunciation. So when the Master enquired once again, Subodh immediately replied: 'He hasn't been able to renounce his family. What could I learn about God from him?' But the Master smiled and reiterated his advice: 'No, my child. Please go.' In order to follow the Master's instruction he finally went.

M. heard that Subodh was not very keen to visit him. He said: 'It is quite true. I am nobody, but I live beside the ocean of knowledge and bliss, and I keep a few pitchers of that water with me. When a guest comes, I offer that to him.' The idea is that there was nothing of his own in what he presented. He had filled his mind with Sri Ramakrishna's teachings just as a container is filled with ocean water. This shows why the Master was so insistent on M.'s giving up all argumentation and why he advised him that argumentation was not for him.

M. was charmed hearing the Master's singing. In fact, those who heard him sing said that if one once heard the Master's singing, then one would never like any other singing. So M. enquired whether there would be any more singing, and the Master asked him to visit Balaram Bose's house, where there would be more singing. Perhaps this was an occasion to introduce M. to his circle of devotees. We can also assess the pattern of his preaching work. Wherever he went, he was sure to inform all concerned for whom the visit was meant. He needed a band of pure souls capable of receiving and retaining without any change the unique message he delivered for the

good of the world. He also wanted to bind such pure souls together so that they would build up an organization later. Though he did not categorically say that, it was clearly evident from his conduct that his work was progressing along a well-defined path. While discussing his life in *The Great Master*, Swami Saradananda has showed us that even very insignificant incidents of Sri Rāmakrishna's life were important. Superficially, we may not always be able to make out the real significance. But an in-depth examination will clearly reveal that he worked following a definite design in order to serve the special need of the age. He might not have done so consciously, but he worked as an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother.

Spreading the Master's Message

It is not that Sri Ramakrishna visited only a few elderly seekers of religion. He also went to the so-called atheists and agnostics, even uninvited. He made it a point to visit the renowned and prominent personalities of those days. Perhaps he himself did not know the reason for his great eagerness; but it was an avenue through which his ideas, so suitable for modern age, could be disseminated. He also desired that the devotees should gather together, discuss divine matters, sing and dance, and raise a mart of joy and mirth. Thus an exalted spiritual song would be composed, which would be carried home and then spread far and wide by the assembled devotees. Simultaneously, he trained those belonging to his inner circle in such a way that his ideas would flow ceaselessly through them without suffering any change. He specifically advised them: 'Don't go hither and thither. Come here alone. Those who belong to my inner circle will come only here.' It is indeed surprising! How could such words come from him who was as magnanimous as the sky? He said this because otherwise his disciples would not be able to spread his message without distortion.

Following a well-designed plan, a special mission was being achieved through him, without his conscious knowledge, according to the will of the Divine Mother. Perhaps he himself did not know anything about it. His lack of knowledge in this matter made him as simple as a child. On the one hand, he appeared like the great preceptor who envisioned and monitored the past, present, and the future of everybody. On the other hand, he was naive, simple, and helpless like a child. It was as if he was unable to stand on his own without help. This was what made Mathur think that 'father' (as he addressed Sri Ramakrishna) needed him as a resourceful guardian. Otherwise, who would look after this helpless child? Again the same desperate zamīndār, Mathur, surrendered before the child with the prayer: 'O father, do protect me.' Often we are unable to reconcile these two contradictory states, just as we fail to reconcile the two different situations regarding the Master as witnessed by M. On one side he was explaining the most profound spiritual truths; on the other he indulged in joyous, frivolous sport with the young boys. On the one hand he controlled the past, present, and the future of everybody; on the other he behaved like an absolutely helpless child. The combination of these two contradictory ideas, the two states witnessed by M., is a unique feature in the life of an Avatāra.

REFERENCE

1. *Bahuni me vyatītāni janmāni tava chārjuna,
Tānyaham veda sarvāni na tvam vettha paramtapa.*

— Gītā, 4.5

CHAPTER 7

The Gospel (October 16, 1882)

The Master's Reminiscences of His Sādhana

There were occasions when Sri Ramakrishna would describe to the devotees the burning spirit of renunciation and intense longing for God he had had in his early days. He described those things in order to intensify the same in the minds of the listeners. These ideas are communicated from one person to another and act upon the latter so as to awaken his dormant samskāras. This was why the Master reminisced before the devotees. There was no limit to his efforts to awaken the spirit of renunciation and yearning in them. He never discussed anything other than God and, if at all any other topic was ever raised, it would end in God. Suppose the Master had seen a drama or circus or something similar; when discussions were going on, he drew examples from what he had seen to teach the devotees how to turn the mind Godward. Once he visited the Asiatic Society and saw a human skeleton. In order to awaken the spirit of renunciation in the devotees he spoke about the ultimate state of the body and reminded them that its glory is fleeting and for only a couple of days. This is how he inspired people to think about God.

We should keep in mind that whenever the Master spoke about himself it was never done to glorify himself. He spoke so that the devotees who heard him would catch something of the spiritual fire within him.

He spoke about his extreme longing for God. There were times when he had rubbed his face on the ground so violently that it bled, and he cried: 'O Mother, even now you haven't revealed yourself!' The people around used to think he was crazy, or that he was suffering from such a severe pain in his stomach that he was tossing about. Unless such a life is seen, how can people understand the true state of longing and renunciation? But by the time the devotees started coming to him, such moods had passed and he had become calm like an ocean without waves. One cannot teach while one is in the state of ecstasy. He was an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother, and She taught the world in various ways by placing him in different states and in different moods.

Preparation for Spiritual Experience

Many people grumble, 'Why, we repeat the name of God so many times, but nothing happens to us.' It is evident that nothing happens. But when we take God's name are we driven by an intense longing, a sense of want, and an anguish such as that of the Master? Until we reach such a mental state it is not easy to receive His grace. Such intense longing and renunciation are very necessary in spiritual life. Of course, we may feel that though we desire to experience such states, they do not come to us. The Master's reply is that we do not try and prepare ourselves for these experiences. First of all it is necessary to create a spiritual foundation by thinking of God in solitude, keeping holy company, and directing our life towards higher things. We do not receive anything unless we earn it, nor can we retain something we are granted gratuitously. These things can be earned only through *sādhana*. Some may say that we don't have spiritual experiences because the Lord does not grant them. But then do we really desire to have them? And even if He grants these experiences, do we have the capacity to retain them?

Mathur pleaded with the Master, 'Father, you must do something so that I may have ecstasy.' The Master at first tried

to dissuade him, but at last he said, 'I know nothing, my dear. However, I shall tell the Mother and She will do whatever She likes.' After a few days Mathur actually experienced ecstasy and he became almost mad. He went to the Master, clasped his feet, and said: 'Excuse me, Father.... Please take back the ecstasy conferred by you. I don't want it.' In spiritual life it is very important to remember that unless something is earned it cannot be retained even if conferred. Higher states of realizations are achieved only after long and continuous *sādhana*.

Krishnakishore

Now Sri Ramakrishna spoke about Krishnakishore. The latter used to say about himself that he was 'the Spirit, all-pervading like the sky,' or unattached like the sky. He said this because he had studied Vedānta. Smoke goes up in the sky but cannot taint it. Similarly, a sweet or foul smell in the air does not affect the sky. But one day the Master went to Krishnakishore and found him in a pensive mood because the tax-collector had threatened to take away his brass pots, cups, and other utensils if he did not pay his taxes. The Master said to him jokingly: 'But why should you worry about it? Let him take away your pots and pans. Let him arrest your body even. How will that affect you? For your nature is that of Kha [the sky]!'

Here it may seem that the Master was making fun of someone who was in great difficulty. But he was not teasing an ordinary person. Krishnakishore was a Vedāntist and should have been able to appreciate the meaning of the Master's words. The Master wanted to draw Krishnakishore's attention to the discrepancy between his words and his deeds. Though he claimed that he was all-pervading like the sky, Krishnakishore had no idea of the intensity of detachment and the absorption in the ideal one must have in order to feel that one is all-pervading like the sky (*kha*). He was not a hypocrite, but perhaps he was unaware of his inability to assimilate the truth

in his life. It is not good enough to say that one is all-pervading like the sky. One has to behave accordingly. To claim that you are like the sky and at the same time think of worldly objects is contradictory. The Lord has said in the *Gītā*: 'You have been sorrowing for those who should not be grieved for, and (yet) you speak words of wisdom! The learned grieve neither for the dead nor for the living.'¹ You speak like a wise person but act like a fool. Those who have truly realized the Reality do not grieve for others. Lest someone think poorly of Krishnakishore for the contradiction between his words and his actions, the Master earlier talked about his wonderful faith: 'What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had! Once, while at Vrindāvan, he felt thirsty and went to a well. Near it he saw a man standing. On being asked to draw a little water for him, the man said: "I belong to a low caste, sir. You are a brahmin. How can I draw water for you?" Krishnakishore said: "Take the name of Śiva. By repeating His holy name you will make yourself pure." The low-caste man did as he was told, and Krishnakishore, although he was an orthodox brahmin, drank that water. What tremendous faith!'

The Master spoke about the good qualities of Krishnakishore so that people would not think poorly of him. The Master also spoke about his deep regard for saints. Krishnakishore thought that the body of one who constantly thinks of God and has renounced all for the sake of Him is not an ordinary body. Such a body is made of consciousness. The Master also spoke about some flaws in his character. As Krishnakishore was an orthodox brahmin, he did not appreciate the Master casting off his sacred thread. Narrating his state during those days, the Master said: '... No trace of my old self was left. I lost all consciousness of the world. I could hardly keep my cloth on my body, not to speak of the sacred thread! When a person becomes so intoxicated with God like him, he is no longer able to perform formal religious practices. Rituals and formal practices are relevant only until such God-intoxication comes.

Formal Practices and the Goal

Once Sri Ramakrishna was about to pass into samādhi. Seeing this, a holy man sitting beside him cried out: 'Hey, what's this? First fix your āsana, then attempt samādhi.' In other words, one should follow the traditional path of Yoga—restraint (yama), regulation (niyama), posture (āsana), regulated breathing (prāṇāyāma), withdrawal of the sense organs (pratyāhāra), fixing the mind on one object (dhāranā), and meditation (dhyāna). Only after passing through all these stages does one attain samādhi. The holy man never had any occasion to witness such natural samādhi. He had read about samādhi and also knew the stages of Yoga. That is why he cried out, 'First fix your āsana.' If someone experiences samādhi in such an easy and natural way he has no need of observing āsana, etc. Āsana and other stages are but means. Often we tend to regard the means as the end. We should attain inner purity by maintaining external purity. But many times our obsession for external purity defeats the purpose of attaining holiness. We come across people who, in their obsession for external purity, have made that their goal. They are ever alert lest something happens to make them impure. They are not at all aware that the aim of external purity is to attain God, and that by regarding it as an end in itself they are not progressing towards the goal. To them the performance of rituals for making themselves pure is the purpose of life. For this reason, the Master always reminded everybody of the ideal. If somebody, even after taking havishya (self-cooked food of boiled vegetables, rice, butter, etc.), does not keep his mind on God, then such food should be considered useless. It does not matter how strict a person is about his diet and putting sacred marks on his forehead. If he does not move Godward all these are in vain. Perhaps he is not a hypocrite, but he attaches so much importance to all these things that they appear to be the very goal of his life. These so-called holy practices do not bring mental purity. Maybe they will help a bit, but sometimes they

also act as obstacles. Here in our part of the country, we have the notion of 'defilement by touch' (sparśadosha). In South India there is 'defilement by look' (drishtidosha)—even a look can make something impure! Instead of carrying an aspirant Godward, such a state of mind degrades him. This is what the Master taught.

Faultfinding

The Master gave yet another example of his state during his days of sādhanā. He would speak out his mind to everyone in a God-intoxicated state. When Jatindra Tagore cited the example of Yudhishtira's vision of hell, the Master was annoyed and said: 'What sort of man are you? Of all the incidents of Yudhishtira's life, you remember only his seeing hell. You don't remember his truthfulness, his forbearance, his patience, his discrimination, his dispassion, his devotion to God.' The Master always reminded us that thinking of the good qualities of others turns one's mind towards virtues and keeps it from going down. We often discuss others' failings in order to make ourselves look superior. By criticizing others we want to show that we do not have those faults. In other words, we are praising ourselves. The Master therefore cautioned us.

One day, in a God-intoxicated state, he slapped the cheeks of Jaya Mukherjee, who, though repeating the name of God, was thinking of worldly things. He did the same to Rani Rasmani another day. Though his aim was only to help people on their paths of spiritual development, yet, he was unhappy about slapping Jaya Mukherjee and Rani Rasmani. He was anxious to rid himself of this habit. He said: 'After praying to the Divine Mother for some time with great yearning, I was able to shake off this habit.' He encouraged the devotees to perform sādhanā, but he did not like playing the role of a preceptor or a taskmaster. This happened also in the life of Jesus Christ. Once he went into a temple and found that money-changers were sitting in long rows with piles of coins

stacked in front of them. They had made a market-place of the temple. He was so annoyed that he made a rough whip out of some cord and beat the money-changers, driving them out from the temple. In great anger, Jesus said, 'It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves!'² But he was not always like that. On another occasion, an immoral girl was to be punished. According to the then laws of the land she was to be stoned to death. When Jesus heard of the judgement he said, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' The men became silent. Not one among them could say he had never sinned. One by one they went away. In order to teach people, great souls are sometimes terrible as a thunderbolt and other times soft as flowers.

Continuing his reminiscences of the different states of his sādhanā, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'When one gets into such a state of mind, one does not enjoy any conversation but that about God. I used to weep when I heard people talk about worldly matters.' He had seen Vārānaśī as filled with divine consciousness and had the vision of Lord Viśvanātha everywhere. But as he constantly had to hear worldly discussions there also, he felt pained. He had accompanied Mathur on a pilgrimage to Vārānaśī. There at the raja's house, Mathur, the raja, and others were discussing various worldly matters. The Master felt so much pain that he wept bitterly and said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, where have you brought me?' He could have avoided such a situation at Dakshineswar, but here in the drawing-room of these people he had no choice. So he wept.

REFERENCES

1. *Aśochyānanvaśochastvam prājñāvēdānścha bhāṣhase,
Gatāsunagatāsunścha nānuśochanti panditāh.*

— *Gītā*, 2.11

2. *Bible*, St. Matthew, 21.13

CHAPTER 8

The Gospel (October 16, 1882)

In this chapter of the *Gospel*, we find Sri Ramakrishna totally absorbed in devotional songs with some devotees. Narendra's association with the Master had just begun. Therefore, owing to his past association with the Brāhmo Samāj, he mostly sang Brāhmo songs. Even though the songs were of the Brāhmo Samāj, they did not always represent the formless aspect of God. In the song beginning with the line 'In Wisdom's firmament the moon of love is rising full', there is a description at the end of the devotees totally absorbed in dancing and singing at the feet of the Mother. It is known that Trailokya Sanyal of the Brāhmo Samāj composed the song inspired by seeing the devotees dancing and singing around the Master.

A Change in the Brāhmo Samāj

Sri Ramakrishna's ideas gradually influenced the minds of the followers of the Brāhmo Samāj. Previously they used to sing, no doubt, but it was not their practice to perform sankīrtan (group singing of devotional songs), totally absorbed in divine bliss. Coming in contact with the Master, however, Keshab assimilated the attitude of enjoying the bliss of God as Mother. In the West, Keshab Chandra Sen had become famous as a great religious speaker. But later Prof. Max Müller observed a change in him—his serene attitude was replaced by ecstatic love and devotion and worshipful attitude towards the

Divine Mother. On making inquiries into the reason for this sudden and momentous change in Keshab's life, the Professor discovered the 'Paramahansa of Dakshineswar.' Then he became curious about Sri Ramakrishna. He collected some information and wrote an article about Sri Ramakrishna in the periodical *The Nineteenth Century* entitled 'A Real Mahātman'. Later, he became acquainted with Swami Vivekananda, and on the basis of facts supplied by Swamiji, he wrote a small book on Sri Ramakrishna. We have come to know that Prof. Max Müller had great reverence for Sri Ramakrishna. He considered it a great day when he met Swami Vivekananda. He said, 'It is not every day one meets a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.'

After the sankirtan M. was talking to Narendra about the decline in moral values of the younger generation of those days. When the Master heard this he became grave and said to M. rather seriously: 'This kind of conversation is not good. It isn't desirable to indulge in any other talk but that of God.' It does not do us any good if we discuss others' faults. Rather, it is good to discuss others' virtues. The scriptures say: 'Know that Self alone that is one without a second, and give up all other talk. This is the bridge leading to immortality.' The mind operates as it has been nurtured. The Master used to say that the mind was like a cloth in a dyeing shop; it takes the colour of the dye in which it has been immersed. By trying to find faults in others, our own mind is tainted. We may think that we are discussing these things to keep our mind above these failings, but instead it actually gets degraded. When we discuss others' faults our mind must come down to that level. The Holy Mother said, 'Do not find fault with others.' Not seeing others' faults does not mean we should keep our eyes shut. It means we should train ourselves in such a way that we see others' virtues and not their faults.

M.'s Dream

Once again the devotees began to dance around the Master. When the singing was over the Master asked a

devotee, 'Do you ever have dreams?' The devotee was actually M. himself. Hearing the details of his dream, the Master said: 'Oh, I am thrilled to hear the story!... Please be initiated by a guru as soon as possible.' He asked M. to be initiated and to begin spiritual sādhanā because that dream signified a particular state of his mind. The Master did not suggest that M. must be initiated by himself.

Often we take dreams far too literally. The Master advised us that there was no need to do this. M.'s dream indicates his state of mind, that he had developed a longing to cross this ocean of the world. Understanding M.'s longing, the Master advised him, 'Please be initiated by a guru as soon as possible.' The Master was thrilled because that auspicious moment had arrived in the life of this devotee to set out for a journey to the spiritual realm through sādhanā. By formal initiation he could begin his sādhanā along a definite path. We have strange ideas about dreams. We sometimes feel happy and sometimes sad by taking dreams to be true. We should remember the scriptures do not say that dreams are true. Dreams are purely projections of the mind. Our thoughts take the shape of dreams. Dreams are just dreams, and we should never value them as we do incidents of the waking state. Often we dream that Śiva, Kālī, the Master, or the Holy Mother appear and talk to us.

Then why is it that the Master, on hearing about the dream, was thrilled and advised M. to be formally initiated? The dream indicated that the ground had been prepared; otherwise such thoughts would not have come in M.'s mind. So the Master became excited. He felt M. should begin sādhanā in a systematic way, so he said, 'Please be initiated.' The Master hardly ever initiated anyone personally; not even those very close to him. But he would inscribe a mantra on someone's tongue, or awaken spiritual knowledge by his mere touch in another. In the scriptures this is called *śāmbhavī dīkshā*. The Master gave initiation in various ways. But here, instead of doing anything, he said, 'Please be initiated by a guru as soon

as possible.' This means that the Master wanted M. to be formally initiated so he could begin spiritual practices in a systematic way. What we call initiation, or receiving a mantra is a particular method of *dīkshā*, but it is not the only method. Saints with great spiritual powers are capable of transmitting ideas into the hearts of devotees by their mere wish. They need not follow the method of verbal initiation (*śrutidīkshā*).

The Master did not say what the dream meant. So we cannot say for certain how he understood it. In the dream there is reference to 'the whole world enveloped in water', which may signify the turbulent ocean of worldly life. 'A few boats were visible, but suddenly huge waves appeared and sank them'—that is, small boats which are capable of crossing a river are not sufficient. A big ship is necessary. Similarly, the help of a great soul with immense spiritual powers is necessary. '...we saw a brahmin walking over that expanse of water'—that is, it is possible to cross that expanse of water easily because there is a bridge under the water. To the question, 'Where are you going?' the other replied, 'To Bhawānīpur'. By 'Bhawānīpur', is the Mother aspect of God, 'Mother Bhawānī', being suggested? It is possible. The devotee said, 'I shall accompany you,' and the reply came, 'It will take you some time to get out of the boat.' In order to reach the goal we must practise *sādhana*. Only then can we hope to attain anything. Of course, we can only analyse the dream according to our own ideas.

The Master in Bhāvamukha

The next morning the Master was up before the other devotees. Naked like a child, he was pacing back and forth and chanting in his sweet voice: 'Veda, Purāna, Tantra; Gītā, Gāyatrī; Bhāgavata, Bhakta, Bhagavān'. Referring to the Gītā, he repeated many times, 'Tāgi, tāgi, tāgi'. Now and then he would say: 'O Mother, Thou art verily Brahman, and Thou art verily Śakti. Thou art Purusha and Thou art Prakriti. Thou art

Virāt. Thou art the Absolute, and Thou dost manifest Thyself as the Relative. Thou art verily the twenty-four cosmic principles.' The Master was visualizing different manifestations of the one God. To him God was not just formless or not just with form. The Master remained absorbed in a state of consciousness in which he saw that God had become everything. After the Master had been living in the nirvikalpa state of consciousness (that is, absorbed in non-dual Brahman) continually for six months, he heard a voice saying, 'Remain in Bhāvamukha.' The author of *The Great Master* explains the word bhāvamukha thus: That which is the source (mukha) of all ideas (bhāva). Bhāva means something that exists; etymologically it is derived from the verb bhu (to exist). It is that place where everything originates, the meeting-place of Dvaita and Advaita. If a lamp is put on the door-sill of a room, its light falls both within and without the room. In the same way, in bhāvamukha the aspirant experiences the Absolute which is beyond all ideas, as well as the manifestation of the Absolute in different forms and ideas of the relative world. In the scriptures this is called 'Dehalidipaka Nyāya' (the maxim of the lamp at the door-sill).

Because the Master remained in the state of Bhāvamukha, scores of ideas manifested in his mind. He says, 'Thou art verily Brahman, Thou art verily Śakti.' Well, how can both be true? We know it is said, Brahman is inert and Śakti is active. Therefore, if one is true, the other must be untrue. Thus if one be true and the other untrue, then how can both be seen simultaneously? It is like the knowledge of a snake in a rope. When we see the snake, we do not see the rope. It is true, we are seeing two objects, but not at any given moment. We do not perceive both together. But besides this, there is yet another state when we see both the snake and the rope. The Master often said, 'As I see the world, I also see Him everywhere.' 'Thou art verily the twenty-four cosmic principles.' But a state in which He becomes everything is logically fallacious in Vedānta. Only one exists, not diversity. Again, a

Viśishtādvaitin says that He has become everything. We should specially note that an aspirant is in the states of Dvaita, Advaita, or Viśishtādvaita at different stages of his spiritual sādhanā.

The question may be raised: Can all the theories be equally valid? One and the same reality can, if He so desires, assume form or become formless. With our limited intelligence we fail to understand that God is almighty, and it is He who has become everything. This is the cause of various debates and arguments. Therefore, That which is beyond all comprehension cannot be explained by the Advaitin's statement 'He is One'. The term 'Advaita' is not used as a qualifier. It is used in the negative sense, meaning that which is not dvaita (dual). The state of Advaita cannot be expressed in words. That state is beyond all speech, beyond the mind. As the Master remained in the state of bhāvamukha, he could comprehend all the states—Advaita, Dvaita and Viśishtādvaita.

The Uniqueness of Devotion

In the meantime the morning service had begun in the temples of Kālī and Rādhākānta. Sounds of conch-shells and cymbals filled the air. From the nahabat floated the sweet melody of musical instruments, befitting the morning hours. Revered Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda) said in later days that the Master used to chant divine names then in such a sweet voice that it would melt even a stone.

Narendra and other devotees came to the Master, who was standing on the northwest verandah of his room. Narendra spoke about the arrival of some sannyāsis belonging to the sect of Nānak at the Panchavatī. The Master did not respond to that. He said instead: 'I would like to see you all sitting together on the mat.' What did the Master see? He was looking with evident delight at the future heirs to his enormous spiritual wealth. He then spoke about spiritual discipline: 'Bhakti, love of God, is the essence of all spiritual

discipline. Through love one acquires renunciation and discrimination naturally.' The Master emphasized the words 'through love'. During the practice of spiritual discipline an aspirant puts emphasis on such aspects as japa, meditation, control of sense-organs, etc., but the Master said that of all spiritual disciplines, love of God is the best. If one develops love of God then he does not have to struggle for acquiring renunciation and discrimination. They come automatically. Then one does not feel any attraction for objects of sense enjoyment. Renunciation and dispassion come naturally.

While engaged in sādhanā, the question often arises in the mind of an aspirant as to which should come first—dispassion and discrimination or love for God? It should be kept in mind that dispassion, discrimination, japa, austerities, control of breath (prāṇāyāma), and so on, are all means and not the end. These are useful only if we are able to acquire love for God through them. Otherwise, they are of no use. However, the means are not insignificant. They have their value as means to an end. It is said in the *Bhāgavata* that one who surrenders to God develops dispassion for everything except love for God and the desire for the realization of the supreme Truth.

Then how should we regard love for God—as a means or as the end? In this regard the sādhakas say that there are two kinds of devotion: one is the way and the other is the goal. Devotion is both the facilitator and the attainment. As a means to sādhanā, it is called ritualistic devotion (vaidhī bhakti). Here there is emphasis on the practice of japa, formal worship, etc. Ritualistic devotion is the means or sadhanā. It is indeed the essence of sādhanā. But the purpose is God-realization. That is the goal. When one develops love for God, the means have little or no significance. The Master explains that spades and buckets, etc., are necessary to dig a well. But once the well is dug and water comes to the surface, then there is no need for the spades and buckets. Some people throw them away and some keep them for others' use.

Gopal's mother, who had attained perfection through japa, once asked the Master if she should continue doing japa. The Master told her: 'You don't have to do japa any further. But you may do so for the good of Gopal!' This is the state of an aspirant after attaining perfection. The love at this stage is without any consideration. It is selfless love. How does a devotee live after God-realization? He lives only with God. This love is called *parā bhakti*. Often we speak of selfless love; but such love manifests in an aspirant only after he attains supreme Knowledge—after God-realization and not before. Before that, however, the aspirant longs to attain Him. After one attains Him there is no point in calling on Him. Then there is only selfless love.

The Path of Tantra

Narendra raised the issue of Tantra. He had heard that the Tantras prescribe spiritual discipline in the company of women. The Master replied: 'That is not desirable. It is a very difficult path and often causes the aspirant's downfall. There are three such kinds of discipline. One may regard woman as one's mistress or look on oneself as her handmaid or as her child.' The Master said further: 'I look on woman as my mother. To look on oneself as her handmaid is also good; but it is extremely difficult to practise spiritual discipline looking on woman as one's mistress. To regard oneself as her child is a very pure attitude.' If one considers a woman as one's mother the mind is quietened. We should remember that the Master practised *sādhana* through all the paths, but he did not instruct others to practise such spiritual disciplines. The Master tested them personally and he concluded: 'The attitude of a child to its mother is pure.' This was also his own attitude. The attitude of regarding a woman as one's mistress (*vīrabhāva*) is extremely difficult. We cannot even imagine it. At no time did society openly permit such *sādhana*. It was always practised secretly. Here the *sādhaka* considers himself as Śiva, and Śakti

is his wife. More often than not this attitude leads to his downfall. In the Tantras this particular sādhanā is prohibited for the ordinary sādhakas. Heroic aspirants are allowed to practise sādhanā according to vīrabhāva; but the Master insisted that mātribhāva was the purest and best sādhanā. In vīrabhāva there is provision for vāmāchāra (ritualistic practices with women). The Master warned aspirants to avoid that path. One of his disciples once dressed himself as a vāmāchārī (practitioner of vāmāchāra) for fun. Narendra jokingly said: 'I shall become a vāmāchārī [quoting a line from a song].' Though he said it in fun, the Master became very grave. He was so vigilant.

The Master then explained that 'everything is possible for God.' He narrated the story of two yogīs and Nārada. God could make even elephants pass through the eye of a needle. Hearing this, one of the yogīs said: 'Is this anything to wonder at? Everything is possible for God.' It may be impossible for us, but nothing is impossible for Him. Nobody can express His glory in words.

Manomohan of Konnagar arrived with some members of his family on his way to Calcutta. The Master said: 'Today is the first day of the Bengali month, an inauspicious day for undertaking a journey. I hope everything will be well with you.' With a smile he began to talk of other matters. The Master used to laugh at himself for all these things, which he called idiosyncrasies. He used to regard Thursday as an inauspicious day. Once, when the Holy Mother reached Dakshineswar on a Thursday, she was immediately sent back, without a moment's hesitation. Perhaps, he might have been testing the Mother to see if she would accept such an insult without any protest or not. One never knows.

Teaching People

The Master said to the Brāhmo friends of Narendra, 'In meditation one must be absorbed in God.' Nothing is achieved

through mere scholarship and oratory. We must have discrimination and dispassion. We have to establish the deity in the shrine of our heart. In a dirty temple, where there is no love, no renunciation, no discrimination, it does not make any sense to make a big noise. It is like blowing a conch-shell for nothing. The Master said time and again that lecturing and teaching should come only after God-realization. 'First of all set up God in the shrine of your heart, and then deliver lectures as much as you like.' As regards teaching people the Master said: 'Only if a man gets a command from God, after realizing Him, is he entitled to teach.' We should always keep in mind that giving lectures is not synonymous with talking about God. Lecturing comes from 'a holier than thou' attitude: You accept what I say and follow me. However, talking about God with all humility is an altogether different thing. Here the Master was referring to those who lectured with a desire for name and fame.

Master's Assurance to M.

M. was extremely worried hearing the Master say again and again, 'God cannot be realized without discrimination and renunciation.' He thought, 'Do discrimination and dispassion mean giving up "woman and gold"?' He was at a loss to know what to do, so he asked the Master: 'What should one do if one's wife says: "You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide."?' The Master replied in a serious tone, 'Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life.' This is indeed a very difficult instruction for most people, so M. stood leaning against a wall. Even Narendra and the other devotees were stunned. They had never before seen the Master speaking in such a harsh tone.

After a moment, the Master suddenly went to M. and whispered in his ears: 'But if a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control—the king, wicked persons, and his wife. Sincere love of God on the husband's part may

eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life. If the husband is good, then through the grace of God the wife may also follow his example.' It is needless to say that here the Master was not referring only to wives. He meant either spouse.

M. was extremely afraid of the world. The Master repeated what Sri Chaitanya had said, 'There is no hope of salvation for the worldly-minded.' Who does not have any hope of salvation? He who is not devoted to God, since such a person is truly worldly. But a person has nothing to fear if he remains in the world after God-realization. The feeling of 'me and mine' is what constitutes samsāra. A samsārī is one who passes through the cycle of births and deaths. He has no hope unless he acquires love for God. But there is nothing to fear if one lives in the world in a detached way, or after God-realization.

CHAPTER 9

The Gospel (October 27, 1882)

Keshab Chandra Sen had come to take Sri Ramakrishna for a trip on a steamer. M. has nicely described the scene—the Ganges, the Dakshineswar temple, the blue sky, and above all the fountain-head of all beauty, Sri Ramakrishna. M. was about to witness a meeting of Keshab with Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab—Opposite Streams

The educated youths of contemporary Bengal were enchanted by Keshab. His erudition, his extraordinary powers of oratory, and above all his introduction of a new method of spiritual life based upon the worship of the formless Brahman—all these had made Keshab a source of attraction to the then modern youths. And M. was one of them. Naturally, he would compare Keshab with Sri Ramakrishna to ascertain their similarities. He was wondering what made Keshab so devoted to the Master; and what indeed had the Master found in Keshab that drew him to the latter? Their life-streams were flowing in two different ways. Keshab was highly educated, and the Master was almost illiterate. The Master was an idol-worshipper, while Keshab's war cry was against idolatry. The Master valued traditional ideas. He honoured everything—old methods of worship, rituals, the almanac, and everything else, while not to follow them were the rules and canons of Keshab's new religion. Keshab was a householder while the Master, despite having no outer sign of formal sannyāsa, was

the ideal of the *sannyāsis*. Again, the Master was not a *sannyāsi* of the ascetic type. He did not have a long beard or matted hair, or ashes on his body. On the contrary, he had shoes on his feet, and sometimes wore socks. So he was either thoroughly undisciplined or was far too progressive. To put it precisely, he was not at all attractive to the orthodox, while he was very much lagging behind according to modern standards. He had no education, and his language lacked style and refinement. His dress was out of fashion. He wore a shirt no doubt, but there is no certainty as to when and how he would wear it. He also wore a dhoti, but again one was not sure whether it would be held up around his waist or he would roll it up under his armpit. Consequently, one could hardly expect to move around freely in all sections of society with a person like him. That was precisely why Devendranath Tagore forbade him from attending a function, though he had extended a formal invitation. That, in a nutshell, is the kind of recognition he received from contemporary society. So what did Keshab, with his modern outlook, find in such a character as Sri Ramakrishna? Or, what made the Master become so intensely attracted to Keshab, who was considered almost a heretic by the orthodox? Anyway, we know that M. was fairly intimate with Keshab, and the intimacy was so great that M. was welcomed on the steamer. Now he was eager to see the Master in the eyes of the Brāhmo devotees as also to see the Brāhmo devotees from the Master's point of view. He joined the party with that intent, and he observed and described everything.

As soon as the Master got into the boat he passed into *samādhi*. Nothing was disclosed about the state of the Master's mind, so we do not know anything for certain. But we can reasonably guess that perhaps thoughts of Keshab came to his mind—the pious Keshab, the devoted and ardent God-loving Keshab. Following that he must have become absorbed in thoughts of God and so passed into *samādhi*. The Brāhmo devotees highly appreciated the scene, a rare one even in the world of gods and goddesses, so to say. It may have been

written in books about how a man can be so deeply absorbed in thoughts of God so as to even lose body consciousness. But how many people are fortunate enough to witness such a scene? It is not a state of hypnotic trance when one faints away, which is but a state of unconsciousness.

Incidentally, some of our friends have experienced such a state. While singing devotional songs (kīrtan) they would sometimes lose consciousness. Just as they would lose consciousness of the external world, they would not have any internal consciousness either. It would be a total loss of awareness. We do not say that it is true of all types of ecstasy (bhāva) or samādhi. We are speaking about those types we normally come across. The reason why we explain this is that we should be very careful about such experiences. Otherwise, finding superficial similarities, we are likely to err and conclude that an ordinary state is an exalted stage of spiritual attainment. But the state of the Master was fundamentally different. He was immersed in an ocean of bliss. Bliss was flowing all around him and his face was beaming with the same bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna was escorted onto the steamer with great care. He was unable to walk, as his sense organs were not functioning then. Somehow he was seated in the cabin, people jostling to see him. As he came down from samādhi to the normal plane, the first thing he uttered was: 'Mother, why have you brought me here? They are hedged around and not free. Can I free them?'

On many other occasions the Master had lashed with his whip of words. But such whippings never gave rise to any animosity because he who whipped was filled with boundless compassion. We are so deeply asleep; how can he waken us without whipping us in such a way? We know that while bitterly criticizing us on the one hand, on the other, he was filled with boundless sympathy and thoughts of our well-being. The thought of our well-being was so demanding that he even disregarded his own salvation and entreated the

Mother: 'Mother, don't make me unconscious, I want to talk to them.' That exalted state of samādhi, for the attainment of which yogis, sages, and saints struggle for ages, he forsook to be able to remove the miseries and sufferings of human beings. So when Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Mother, can I free them from their bondages?' he was actually praying thus: 'Mother, give me the strength and the power so that I can deliver them by breaking their bonds.'

Thereafter one of the devotees said: 'Sir, Pavahāri Bābā keeps your photograph in his room.' Pointing to his body, the Master said with a smile: 'Just a pillow-case.'

The Master's Photograph while in Samādhi

It is one thing to hang someone's photograph to remember the ideals of that person. But it is another thing if it becomes merely a showpiece along with other furniture and fixtures in a room. Then there is no point in hanging it. The above statement was not addressed to Pavahāri Bābā. Sri Ramakrishna was addressing ordinary people. If we accept the truth that lies behind a photograph, remember the ideals that it stands for, try to emulate those ideals in our life, and see the photograph only in such light, then our floral offerings, our respect, and so on become worthwhile. Otherwise, it will remain only a lifeless picture, which cannot take us on a right path.

We know that the Master himself once saluted his own photograph, which is now being worshipped in many homes. He also prophesied: 'This represents a high yogic state. This form will be worshipped in every home as time goes by.' He could foresee it. But do we really see his photograph in that light and worship it as an aid to our progress along the spiritual path? If we do, then and then only will our worship be fruitful. Otherwise everything will be in vain. By using the expression 'just a pillow-case' it appears that the Master expresses the above idea itself. That is why we find that the

same Master who regarded the body as an insignificant object was so overwhelmed looking at his picture in the state of samādhi and saluted it, saying: 'It will be worshipped in every home as time goes by.' We find proof everywhere today of how his prophesy is becoming true.

He Abides in the Devotee's Heart

The Master continued: '...But you should remember that the heart of the devotee is the abode of God,... His drawing-room.' The Master used these words rather strongly to make a point. There is no doubt that this world is transient. But in this transient world also He is seen—His special manifestation is perceived. If this phenomenal world is dismissed as transient and fleeting, then our link to reach Him is also severed. We cannot conceive of Him as being beyond this world, as being somewhere else. We meditate on Him thinking that He pervades the entire creation, or that He abides in our heart. We view this world as an object of our sense perception and say that He is immanent in it. Again, we also say that He abides within us. 'He is within everything and also without' '*Tadantarasya sarvasya*,' so says the Upanishad. Now if He abides outside, to what extent does he do so? We do not know His limits. Then in what sense is there this internal and external differentiation? We may speak of internal or external with reference to an accepted and limited point. Let us say our body is the point of reference; then He abides within this body and beyond this body. That is why the sages say that He manifests himself in the devotee's heart. He is everywhere. But when we say 'the devotee's heart is His drawing-room' we mean His special presence is there. What do we mean by His being specially present there? Does He exist there in a more concentrated form? God is not an object which can be solidified at one place and turned into liquid at another. He exists everywhere. Just as He exists in the entire universe and even beyond that, He exists within the dust particles also. But

still our question is where do we find Him? So to make Himself within our reach, He says that if He is to be reached, find Him in a place where His presence is greater. It is not claimed that His presence is 'greater' here. His manifestation is more; that is, His manifestation is more clearly perceived in a devotee's heart. So if we intend to experience His presence, we shall have to search for Him in the 'devotee's heart', where His presence is easily comprehensible. Otherwise, what if He is immanent in the entire creation? Even if He is in the minutest principle in this creation, of what help is such a concept to us since we cannot lay our hands on Him, or feel Him, or imagine Him? We need something which we can grasp, touch, and feel. This is why Sri Ramakrishna has showed us the 'devotee's heart', which is well within our reach.

A Jñānī and a Bhakta

The Master next spoke about Bhagavān: '...He who is called Brahman by the jñānīs is known as Ātman by the yogīs, and as Bhagavān by the bhaktas.' Needless to say that in the *Gospel* the expression 'Knowers of Brahman' (brahmajñānī) has been used many times to denote the devotees belonging to the Brāhmo Samāj. But they do not actually fall under the category of jñānīs. They are devotees (bhaktas). The Master has explained elsewhere differently; he says that a jñānī is one who strives for the pursuit of knowledge through reasoning, whereas the Brāhmo devotees want to taste the Supreme through His attributes. The latter are the worshippers of the formless Brahman with attributes. They want a God who is kind, affectionate, compassionate, and loving—One whom they can call Father or Mother and derive satisfaction. We want such a God who hears our prayer, fulfils our desires, and leads us to liberation. Brahman does not do such things. Why do we meditate on Brahman then? Why do Advaitins discuss Brahman? Of what avail is that Brahman to them? But they say that Brahman is not to be put to use. It is only necessary to

know him. If we are successful in knowing Him, then the realization will dawn in us that our pain and pleasure are due to our ignorance. Our essential nature is that supreme Brahman who is beyond all happiness and misery. A human being will himself become Brahman. That is, all that stands in the way of his realizing Brahman will melt away.

Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Do you know how a lover of God feels? His attitude is: "O God, Thou art the Master, and I am Thy servant. Thou art the Mother, and I am Thy child."' The devotee of God wants to eat sugar, not to become sugar. He wants to taste Him as his Mother or Father or Friend or near and dear relative—in His myriad forms. In order to enjoy bliss, whether we imagine Him as having a form or not is secondary. Brāhmo devotees do not imagine Him as having a form; nevertheless they are keen to enjoy His bliss, so they are devotees. The Master saw Keshab from that angle and found in him a heart full of love of God, a heart in which there is tremendous sincerity and genuine yearning for God. And this, indeed, is the cord that bound the Master and Keshab together, which M. wanted to find out.

CHAPTER 10

The Gospel (October 27, 1882)

The Master and Keshab

In the previous chapter, the subject discussed was Keshab's taking Sri Ramakrishna on a steamer from Dakshin-eshwar. That is being continued here. Keshab Sen had come to Dakshin-eshwar to take Sri Ramakrishna for a trip on a steamer. A large number of devotees were with Keshab. Sri Ramakrishna took a small boat to reach the steamer. As he boarded the boat he passed into samādhi. With great difficulty the Master was brought back to normal consciousness and was helped into the steamer. He was still in an indrawn mood. All the devotees were eager to hear every word from him, so they crowded into the cabin. As all could not go inside, many of them stood outside and eagerly waited to hear him. The Master went into samādhi again. He was totally lost to the external world.

As he came down to the normal plane, the Master said in a low voice: 'Mother, why have you brought me here? They are hedged around and not free. Can I free them?' He alone knew in what sense he said that. M. has commented that, perhaps the Master meant that all people were hedged inside this illusory world. Would it be possible to free them? It was as if this was his question and also his prayer to the Divine Mother. Thereafter the Master narrated in detail about how the same Principle was called Brahman, Paramātman, and Bhagavān by the jñānī, the yogī, and the bhakta respectively. We have discussed this in the previous chapter.

Sri Ramakrishna was talking ceaselessly about God, and the devotees were listening to him in rapt attention. M. says that the devotees were so absorbed in the discourse that they were hardly aware of the steamer's movement. Everyone was eagerly drinking to their heart's content the nectar that was flowing.

The Philosophies of Vedānta, the Brāhmo Samāj, and Tantra

The Master said: 'The Brahmajnānīs of Vedānta say that the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings, are the manifestations of Śakti, the Divine Power.' As he sat before the Brāhmo devotees, he used the specific expression 'Brahmajnānīs of Vedānta'. Earlier he had referred to the Brāhmos as Brahmajnānīs, hence the need for this clarification. The followers of Keshab who go by the name Brahmajnānī are not Brahmajnānīs of the school of Vedānta. They are not worshippers of the formless, attributeless Brahman. They do not even acknowledge the formless, attributeless Brahman. They worship the formless Brahman but with attributes. The formless, attributeless principle is called Brahman. When It is endowed with attributes, no matter if It is with form or without form, It is not generally referred to as Brahman; It is called Īśvara. The Brahmajnānīs of the Brāhmo Samāj believe in Īśvara. The Brahmajnānīs of Vedānta believe in Brahman as formless and without attributes. That is why the Master differentiated the Brahmajnānīs of the Brāhmo Samāj from those of the Vedānta school and said: 'The jnānīs, who adhere to the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedānta say that the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings, are manifestations of Śakti, the Divine Power. If you reason it out, you will realize that all these things are as illusory as a dream. Brahman alone is the Reality, and all else is unreal. Even this very Śakti is unsubstantial, like a dream.'

Herein lies the difference between Vedānta and Tantra. According to Tantra, Śakti is not unreal. Just as Brahman is real, Śakti is also real. Brahman and Śakti are not even treated as two different principles. The same Truth appears in two forms. When It is engaged in creation, preservation, or destruction It is called Śakti. But when It does not perform creation, preservation, and so on, It is called Brahman. So according to the views of Tantra, Brahman is as real as Śakti is. Now since both the stages are true, does it not generate the fallacy of duality? No, Tantra says it does not, Because Brahman and Śakti are identical—indeed, one principle. But the Vedāntists say that Śakti is unreal. Brahman alone is Real and all else is unreal.

Brahman and Śakti are Identical

Next the Master said, 'But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in samādhi, you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Śakti.' The state in which one fully loses all sense of action and the existence of the phenomenal world is called the state of samādhi. In that state the aspirant no doubt transcends the jurisdiction of Śakti, but as long as he has the awareness of this phenomenal world and as long as he feels the 'I' in him, he cannot hope to move away from the domain of Śakti. This is what is reiterated by the Master: '...But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in samādhi, you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Śakti. Even when you say "I am meditating" or, "I am contemplating", still you are moving in the realm of Śakti, within Its power. ... Thus Brahman and Śakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other.' Thus the Master stressed the positive aspect of accepting both principles. The Master's statement appears to have started a new trend in the Vedānta philosophy. Strictly speaking it cannot be claimed to be new, but one can say that the Master certainly laid greater emphasis on Śakti, whose relative existence was merely acknowledged in

the Vedānta philosophy. The Master repeatedly said that so long as we are bound by the limitations of the body and mind we cannot ignore the significance of Śakti; having assumed a human body we have to acknowledge Śakti.

The purpose of referring to relative existence is this: So long as we consider Brahman as the cause then It is Śakti also. That which is of the nature of the cause is itself Śakti in essence. However, when we say that It is beyond all cause and effect, then only is It Brahman. When we say It is the cause of the universe, or we call It Īśvara, that too is within the jurisdiction of Śakti. We may keep in mind that when the Lord of creation, preservation, and destruction is identified as Brahman in the Vedānta philosophy, that Brahman is not the attributeless Brahman. The *Taittirīya* Upanishad says: 'Try to understand that which is the source of all beings, that through which all these are sustained, and that into which everything finally dissolves. This is Brahman.'¹

That Brahman referred to here, as the Lord of creation, preservation, and destruction is Brahman of the nature of Śakti. Here Brahman is not referred to as being without form or without attributes. Creation is not possible when It is without attributes. Prakriti, with its three attributes (gunas), is different from Brahman. However, it is not the Prakriti of the Sāṅkhya because in the Tantra it is not said to be inert (jada). It is this Primordial energy (Ādyāśakti) which is Kālī. She is the cause of creation, preservation, and destruction. She is called Parameśvarī, or Parameśvar, or causal Brahman. We must therefore bear in mind that even Īśvara is within the domain of Śakti and is not beyond It. So the Master said, 'I am meditating, or I am contemplating—these are all within the jurisdiction of Śakti, within Its power.'

New Outlook of Totapuri

We have to bear in mind that the Advaita teacher of the Master, Totapuri, was a knower of Brahman; he had direct

realization of the Advaitic truth. There is hardly any doubt about this, since the Master himself asserted it repeatedly. But even Totapuri was under the impression that Śakti was unreal. For a long time he did not admit the truth about Śakti. Later, passing through many vicissitudes, he had to acknowledge the existence of the Universal Mother, the primordial Energy. It is apparent that the Master's unique power had mediated in the matter, and so even the die-hard Advaitin in Totapuri was compelled to admit Śakti. The Master too was overwhelmed with joy that, though being a strict Advaitin, Totapuri, the knower of Brahman, had admitted Śakti. Totapuri's recognition of Śakti, filled up a gap, as it were, in his knowledge. A question may be raised—then is it a fact that Totapuri had a gap in his knowledge? No, certainly he had no gap. There is no doubt that he was firmly established in the realization of Brahman. But we can understand that he was not especially aware of the variations that abound in Brahman, or Its myriad forms, as enunciated in the scriptures. Perhaps he had attained supreme realization strictly following his own path of spiritual sādhanā, disregarding all other aspects. So he had no reason to be conscious of the existence of Śakti. We cannot hope to understand a particular spiritual discipline completely just by reading about it in the scriptures. Totapuri lacked direct experience of Śakti, but this lack of knowledge was rectified after he came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna.

Initially, however, he could not at all understand this idea of the Master. We know that when he wanted the Master to be formally initiated into sannyāsa, the latter had replied: 'Wait a moment. Let me ask my Mother.' He went inside the temple and came back after asking the Divine Mother, and he then said, 'Yes, I'll practise Vedānta.' Totapuri smiled a little derisively: 'He is going to practise Vedānta, but he went to his Mother, to ask the stone image inside the temple!' For Totapuri the Goddess inside the temple was just a stone image. He did not know about Her divine presence, nor did he

care to know. It was this Totapuri who had to learn many things from the Master as the days passed by.

We may recall an incident. One afternoon, the Master was engaged in religious discussions with Totapuri. As it became dark he started chanting the names of God while clapping his hands. Seeing him, Totapuri was surprised and asked him sarcastically, 'Hey, are you making chapātis by clapping your hands?' Though Totapuri knew that the Master was born with an extraordinary divine nature and had attained the supreme knowledge of Brahman, he thought that the Master could not shed his latent impressions. Therefore he was chanting the names of God while clapping his hands due to the force of those latent impressions. But the Master just laughed and said: 'What foolishness! I am repeating the names of God, and you say I am making chapātis!' Though Totapuri was being sarcastic at that time, the Master knew for certain that a day would come when he would accept all these spiritual practices. So the Master waited patiently even as he did when he was teaching his disciples later on.

Narendranath, having read *Ashtāvakra Samhitā* and other books at the instance of the Master once commented derisively: 'The rishis and sages must have gone off their heads, or else how could they write such things!' Then the Master replied: 'You may not accept their words now, but why do you abuse the sages?' The Master patiently waited for the right time. Then one day, Narendranath was making sarcastic remarks: 'How can this be? This jug is God, this cup is God, and we too are God; nothing can be more preposterous!' The Master touched him to infuse the truth of Advaita in him and this dispelled all his doubts. In the case of Totapuri, the Master knew that one day he too would realize the truth of dualistic sādhanā. And, indeed, he had to realize it later.

If we are not aware that God exists in myriad forms in the beginning itself, we shall have to learn it later on. This applies to those aspirants, at least, who are to become teachers (āchāryas). Only they can be regarded as true āchāryas who are

blessed with such multifarious experiences in their lives. We are specifically referring to the cases of the great teachers because not all aspirants can necessarily pass through all aspects of spiritual life. If a spiritual aspirant attains supreme realization pursuing one chosen path, it is enough for him—that alone sanctifies his life. But those who are world teachers, and who are to guide others, cannot do so if they have such a restricted outlook. This is because then they will be able to help only those limited number of people in their spiritual life who hold identical views. A large number of people will be out of their reach. That is why the Master said: ‘A nail-knife suffices to kill oneself. One needs a sword and shield to kill others.’ In the same way those who are to become teachers of humanity should acquire experience of all the paths. It is not sufficient for āchāryas to follow a single path. They must have complete knowledge. To bestow that complete knowledge, to remove Totapuri’s lack of knowledge regarding the path of Bhakti, the Master smiled and said: ‘I am repeating the names of God, while you say I am making chapātis!’ Gradually Totapuri learnt to taste that experience. And we know how Totapuri was blessed with the direct vision of the Mother of the universe!

Sri Ramakrishna and His Teachers

One thing we should know here is that though an Incarnation may accept one or more gurus in his spiritual pursuit, those gurus do not become as perfect as he is. We may also bear in mind that by coming in contact with the Incarnation and assisted by him they attain perfection as time passes. In the case of the Master this applies to both Totapuri and Bhairavi Brahmani. Just as Totapuri was ignorant about Śakti, Bhairavi Brahmani was naïve about Advaita Vedānta. We know that when the Master was about to learn Advaita Vedānta from Totapuri, Bhairavi Brahmani tried to caution him: ‘My child, don’t visit him often; do not mix much with

him.... All your ardent affection and intense love for God will vanish, if you mix with him.' So Bhairavi Brahmani had no idea of Advaita Vedānta even as Totapuri had no idea about the path of dualism, or of Śakti. Bhairavi learned much by coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna. So also Totapuri enriched his knowledge by acquiring the experience about Śakti in the company of the Master.

Commenting on the oneness of Brahman and Śakti, the Master said: 'Thus Brahman and Śakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see fire, you must recognize its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn, nor can you think of the power to burn without fire. You cannot conceive of the sun's rays without the sun, nor can you conceive of the sun without its rays.'

It is said: 'Energy and its possessor are identical.' The same object, viewed from one angle is called power, while from another we call it 'the possessor of power'. One cannot ignore the variations that abound in Śakti. Indeed, it is undeniable. But beyond these variations there lies an independent principle that does not undergo any change. Without admitting such an independent reality, it will not be possible to realize the variations in Śakti either. It is imperative to admit this independent abiding reality. This permanent reality manifests in several ways; it is necessary to admit such manifestations also.

Parināmavāda and Vivartavāda

Philosophers look at creation in two ways. Some of them say that it is the actual transformation (parināma) of Brahman; while others say that it is an apparent modification (vivarta) of Brahman. The point is, whether we call it illusion or transformation, it is all tautology. Those who call it an actual transformation say that Brahman actually changes. On the other hand, the followers of Advaita Vedānta say, that which

undergoes change cannot be eternal, and therefore it is unreal. If Brahman suffers any change, then Brahman cannot be eternal; it becomes transient. And then it ceases to be Brahman. To avoid the error, they say that the change we observe should be regarded as only apparent and not an actuality, and they use a philosophical term to connote it, which is 'vivarta'. In vivartavāda the Reality does not suffer any change. In parināmavāda the Reality undergoes transformation. It has been said in a verse: 'Vikāra is the actual modification of a thing—one thing turning into another substance; while vivarta is only an apparent modification.'²

The meaning is, if Reality, without undergoing any change, appears to be many, then it is called vivarta. If the principle itself undergoes change then it is called parināma. The example of milk is given: milk gets actually transformed and becomes curd. The milk ceases to be milk; it becomes curd. This is called transformation; that is vikāra or parināma. The example of illusion (vivarta) is: Suppose there is a piece of rope. It appears on different occasions as a snake, a stick, a part of a garland, a stream of water, and even a crack on the surface of the earth. Though it creates a variety of impressions, the piece of rope itself does not undergo any change because of such impressions. This is called vivarta.

However, from our point of view the manifold appearance of Brahman—call it real or apparent—does not really matter. This is because we are trying to explain a principle which is beyond words and we fail to do so.

The scriptures state that though Brahman is essentially one and non-dual, It appears to be manifold. The power through which it appears manifold is called the Inconceivable Power (achintya-śakti); it is this power which is called the power of creation, preservation, and destruction. Even as Brahman is beyond thought, so is Śakti, because It is beyond the grasp of our intelligence. Just as we cannot measure Brahman by our intelligence, so also we cannot measure Its Śakti. Therefore both the principles escape the reach of our

reasoning. It is thus impossible for us to think of any difference between the two. So we say both are one and indivisible. As Brahman is beyond all reasoning, so is Śakti. Since it is impossible to draw a line of demarcation between the two principles with the help of our reasoning, we consider the two as non-different.

Sri Ramakrishna's Analogy and Explanation

That Brahmasakti, which is not different from Brahman, is sometimes active and sometimes inactive. Here the expression 'sometimes' does not relate to time; the reference is to something in different states. 'Inactive sometimes' means that It is so to someone in a given situation. In a different situation It becomes active for the same person. The Master explained that, keeping in view the two states of existence, 'it is called either Brahman or Śakti.' He further explained: 'When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, destruction, and preservation, then we call It Brahman. But when It engages in these activities then we call It Kālī or Śakti.' The two words 'when' and 'then' are worth noting. What do they signify? Does the significance relate to time? If it is so, then the manifestation of the power of Brahman becomes mutable and measurable by time. But It cannot be measured by time. So we have to understand that the different states relate to the perception of an aspirant in his different mental states. Or, 'when' means a certain state and 'then' means the situation that succeeds. Perhaps it is better explained in the above manner.

Why do we raise this issue at all? Our common belief about the universe is that it is created, preserved, and shall finally be destroyed. But this conception is, indeed, very narrow. Our perception is limited to the universe that we see. But how can we say that a limitless number of such universes do not exist? The Master said: 'Do you think the creation is only this tiny world? Have you seen the crabs breeding in the

Ganges on rainy days? There is a limitless number of such worlds! So there are an infinite number of worlds like the one we perceive as limited by time and space. When a particular world is being destroyed, maybe in another world the process of creation has just begun. This is called partial destruction (khandapralaya) as distinct from total destruction (mahā-pralaya). Total destruction signifies the state when no creation exists anywhere. But how do we know that there is no creation anywhere? Who can say that the entire creation is dissolved? Nobody can. So, instead of trying to understand it from this angle let us try to understand it from the realizations of the aspirants.

An Aspirant is within Śakti's Domain

What do creation, preservation, and destruction signify? They signify that the effect dissolves into the cause. The effect is gross and this dissolves into the subtle. The subtle is dissolved into the cause, and the cause finally dissolves into the Great Cause. The act of dissolution referred to here does not mean going beyond time. If we consider it as cessation of a state, when the gross world does not create any impression on our minds, it can be said to have dissolved into the subtle world. And in the state of mind in which the subtle world is not perceived, it can be said to have dissolved into the causal world. In the state of mind in which even the causal world fails to create any impact, the Cause has merged in the Great Cause, or the state beyond the Cause, which is called the Fourth State (Turiya). Because there is a state beyond the Cause, the gradual evolution of the gross, the subtle, and the Cause becomes possible. So it is not necessary to observe the different stages of the world like creation, preservation, and destruction independent of us—the observers, or those who experience them. That is why Vedānta says that the descriptions of creation, preservation, and destruction are recorded in the scriptures only to lead us to the transcendental Reality. 'The

(scriptural) statements regarding creation as illustrated by the examples of earth, iron, sparks, etc., (only) serve the purpose of (ultimately) explaining the unity (of the jīva and Brahman). (Truly speaking) multiplicity does not exist in any manner.³

There are several other allusions to creation elsewhere, such as, 'a lump of clay' (cf. *Chāndogya Upanishad* 6.1.4.); 'a chunk of gold' (ibid. 6.1.5); or 'sparks of fire' (cf. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.1.1). The only purpose of explaining the ideas of creation is to introduce the subject of the realization of Brahman, and to teach us the idea of unity of the individual soul and Brahman. There is no other justification besides this. Essentially there is no division in Brahman since there is no actual basis for ideas like creation, preservation, and destruction, or the different states like gross, subtle, or causal. This is what the *Māndukya Kārikā* says. If it is so, then all stages up to the Cause are dependent upon our perception of the worlds, and indeed, our perception is what sustains the concepts. As long as we conceive of a Creator of this world, we are under the jurisdiction of Śakti. The limits of Śakti are as far as our spiritual sādhanā can carry us. If, however, we cross all the stages of sādhanā to establish ourselves in the Self, in Brahman, then we go beyond the jurisdiction of Śakti.

However, the fact is that there are different stages to cross before we reach the Truth. We are to pass over them one by one in order to reach the top. Each of the stages is necessary for us. Otherwise we cannot hope to reach the roof. Once we reach the roof, it is vain to brand the stairs as unnecessary. We could reach the roof only because these steps were there. Because there is the domain of Śakti, we can establish ourselves in the unqualified Brahman; or, at least it is possible to do so. Otherwise, what is the justification for the existence of Brahman? Who would have known Him? He would have remained established in Himself. And all our explanations, identifying Him as the cause of this creation and so on, would have been in vain, since they are all based on the reality of Śakti.

So the Master said: 'Thus one cannot think of Brahman without Śakti, or of Śakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of the Relative without the Absolute.'

Brahman and Śakti; the Absolute and the Relative

The Master used two words, 'Śakti' and 'Brahman', initially, but thereafter he changed those words and said, 'the Relative' and 'the Absolute'. One cannot think of the Relative without the Absolute, or of the Absolute without the Relative. The Relative denotes change. And change presupposes that there is a changeless principle behind it; otherwise with reference to what can change be understood? So the moment the word 'change' is used, another reality steps in, which is changeless, eternal. Against its background and comparing with it, we experience the change. Otherwise, there cannot be anything called change. Imagine that we are moving in a train. If things around—the fields, the trees, the vegetation, the houses, etc., keep moving at the same speed as the train, we cannot see the train's movement. Then the expression 'the train is moving' would not have been used. For the entire scene would have remained the same. But when we are in the train and find that the trees and plants are changing their places, the houses and other structures are moving away, then we realize there is change. Which change is permanent and which is transitory is a different matter. What we say here is this: without reference to any permanent object we cannot conceive of any impermanent or changing object. Again, we cannot imagine any permanent object without reference to a changing object. Because 'permanence' and 'impermanence' are two such words, and their meanings are so interconnected that we cannot think of one without the other, therefore we cannot conceive of permanence independent of impermanence and vice versa.

The same logic applies also as regards the Relative and the Absolute. The play of God which is going on—the cycle of creation, preservation, and destruction—signifies change. We cannot conceive of change at all unless we have an eternal principle—an absolute Entity in view. So the Relative cannot be even thought of without reference to the Absolute. Again, as we said earlier, we cannot think of the Absolute without reference to the Relative. Thus Brahman cannot be conceived of without Śakti; neither can Śakti be conceived of without Brahman. They are so inseparably and indivisibly related to each other that one of them cannot even be imagined independent of the other. So Brahman and Śakti are indivisible from this angle of vision.

However, without maintaining the philosophical consistency of this view, many times we say: That which changes is unreal; only the changeless is real. This is because from our perception we know that whatever changes is unreal. If, however, this change, or this divine sport, is real owing to its continuous transformation, why should we have any objection? We cannot say that it is an impossibility. The essential fact is that our logic is based upon the experiences we acquire within our limited sphere, and we cannot think beyond that. That is why the scriptures say, 'Do not try to resolve the issues which are beyond thought through the process of reasoning.' If you do this you will be misled. We apply logic to areas where it cannot reach. This is bad application of logic. We apply logic in areas where its application is not possible. So it fails. That is why the scriptures say that we should not try to resolve the issues which are unreachable by logic and reasoning. Both Brahman and Śakti are inconceivable, because, if we call the subtlest substance of the world Śakti, we cannot conceive of the essence of that Śakti. Again, we cannot conceive of any substance which is beyond space, time, and causation. So if we try to understand Reality through the process of reasoning, we fail. Therefore, trying to disprove Śakti through reasoning is an exercise in futility.

Is Śakti real or unreal? This is just an abstruse philosophical question. Reasoning cannot resolve it. It can be resolved through experience alone. Established upon the firm ground of realization Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Śakti and Brahman are both real.' He says that actually they are not two principles. What we call Śakti is Brahman. Keeping in view Its two different states, we have given two names to facilitate our understanding. Essentially they are not different. That which is Brahman is Śakti, and that which is Śakti is verily Brahman. There is absolutely no difference between the two. There is no question of duality either, as they are not two separate substances. As Reality appears before our understanding from two different angles, we call It either Brahman or Śakti. When It is engaged in creation, preservation, and destruction we call It Śakti. When It ceases to act we call It Brahman. Here the Master explains the truth in such a simple manner that it becomes easy for us to understand. Were it not explained in the way he did, this simple thing would have remained beyond our understanding even after the study of scores of scriptural texts.

The Doctrine of Kālī

The Master discusses the same issue once again: 'The Primordial Power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving, and destroying in play, as it were. This Power is called Kālī. Kālī is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kālī. It is one and the same Reality. When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then we call It Brahman.' The expression 'When we think of It' is worth noting. We have already explained its significance. 'When It is engaged in the acts of creation etc.', or, when we think It acts, 'then we call it Kālī', or, Śakti. The Reality is one and the same. The difference is only in name and form. It is like water called in different languages by different names, like jal (Bengali), water, pānī (Hindi), etc.

As our experience of objects is different, so we give different names to them. Whether we say Kālī, or the Primordial Power (Ādyāśakti), or Brahman, it all depends on our angle of vision or the capacity of our understanding. Giving different names does not change the principle itself. Sri Ramakrishna explained this truth by using the words—jal, water, pānī, etc. If we call water jal, the substance does not undergo any change. It is only a change of the dialect. Some say water, some jal, or some others pānī. Why do we do so? It is because of what we have learnt, what tendencies we have inherited, or what our habit prompts us to do. Motivated by our tendencies, when we perceive that It is engaged in creation, preservation, or destruction, we call It Śakti from that angle of vision. Again, in a state when we are established in the principle of inaction, we call It Brahman. It is only a difference of word. There is no real difference in the nature of the substance at all. Here the Master has firmly reiterated this.

The next issue came up when Keshab said to the Master, 'Describe to us, sir, in how many ways Kālī, the Divine Mother, sports in this world.'

Earlier Keshab had heard this from the Master. The intention was to repeat it here in order to enjoy it again, and let other devotees also hear and enjoy the same. At the outset we must keep in mind what Sri Ramakrishna means by Kālī. Ramprasād composed a song conveying the same idea as that of Sri Ramakrishna:

Knowing the secret that Kālī is one
with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all,
both righteousness and sin.

Or, 'I have realized that the two—Kālī and Brahman are not separate. Having realized this I have shed "righteousness and sin"; that is, I have given up all attributes and have established myself in the highest state which is without any attribute.' Again, in another song he said:

But must I give away the secret,
 here in the market-place?
 From the hints I have given, O mind,
 guess what that Being is!

Or, 'How can I explain Her whom I adore before everybody as the Mother? Try to understand from the hints that I have given.' The idea behind this is, the one whom I call as Mother, or Kālī, or Śakti, or who is described as so many gods and goddesses, is in essence Brahman itself. Does one have to be more explicit?

Beyond the Jurisdiction of Śakti

Thus we see that as long as an aspirant is on the path of sādhanā and has not yet realized the supreme Truth, he is within the jurisdiction of Śakti. Only when the sādhaka passes into nirvikalpa samādhi, can he be said to have left the realm of Śakti. However, when the sādhaka returns to the normal plane, he again steps into Śakti's domain. That is why Totapuri, who had attained the Supreme knowledge, could not enter the state of samādhi at will, because the Primordial Power did not allow him access to the path. Totapuri could not understand this. He didn't know that he had attained nirvikalpa samādhi solely by the grace of Śakti. He was not conscious of it, so he did not think it necessary to acknowledge Śakti. But when he found that his mind, ever dwelling in Brahman, could not transcend this phenomenal world of the three gunas at will so as to enter the state of Turiya, he was surprised. He thought: 'What's this? Never before has my mind disobeyed my instructions. Why has it done so now?' He thought that his body was the root cause of all evils and was determined to shed it. Then also he could not realize that he did not have the freedom to shed or retain his body, that even this was in the jurisdiction of Mahāmāyā. What followed has been recorded: '... the "naked one" slowly got into the water and gradually

waded farther into deeper water... Tota almost reached the other bank but could not get water deep enough for drowning himself. Tota was surprised and thought: "What strange divine Māyā is this? Tonight there is not sufficient water in the river even to drown oneself! What a strange play of God!" And immediately someone, from within, as it were, pulled the veil from his intellect.' Instantly a bright light dazzled him and he saw the Mother, the origin of the universe! Mother, the unthinkable Power! Mother in land, in water, Mother in body and mind—everywhere that Primordial Power (Ādyāśakti) was at play. He realized: 'As long as one is in the body one has no power to be free from Her influence; no, not even to die till She wills.' He offered himself completely at Her feet and accepted Her as the Mother of the universe (Jaganmātā). And now his coming as the guru of Sri Ramakrishna attained its ultimate fruition. We have said earlier that whosoever had come as a teacher to the Master, was able to rectify his or her shortcomings and attain fulfilment in one way or another. We find here how Totapuri rectified his shortcoming. It is stated in the *Chandī*: 'The Divine Mother, or Mahāmāyā, forcibly drawing the minds of even the jñānīs throws them into delusion.'⁴ She does not spare anybody. She draws 'even the minds of the jñānīs.' As the Divine Mother wills She can use anyone like a puppet in Her hands, no matter how exalted a jñānī he or she is. There is nothing to be proud and feel 'I am a great saint'. There is no reason for anyone to raise his head in conceit.

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— *Taittirīya Upanishad*, 3.1.1

2. *Satattvato'nyathāprathā vikāra ityudīritah*
Atattvato'nyathāprathā vivarta ityudīritah.

— *Vedāntasāra*, 138

3. *Mullohavisphulingādyaih srishtiryā choditānyathā.*

— *Māndukya Kārikā*, 3.15

4. *Jnānināmapī chetānsi devī bhagavatī hi sā,*
Balādākrishya mohāya mahāmāyā prayacchati.

— *Chandī*, 1.55–56

CHAPTER 11

The Gospel (October 27, 1882)

Sri Ramakrishna continued his discourse on God with Keshab and other Brāhmo devotees on board the steamer sailing on the Ganges. Keshab wanted to know from the Master in how many ways the Divine Mother Kālī sports. We must bear in mind that Keshab was the leader of the Brāhmo Samāj. It was natural that he worshipped the formless aspect of God and was averse to idolatry. But coming into contact with the Master his one-sided outlook slowly disappeared. He asked the Master: 'Describe to us, sir, in how many ways Kālī, the Divine Mother, sports in this world.' In response the Master referred to Her aspects as Mahākālī and Nityakālī, and said that according to the Tantra the Mother was then the Formless One. Creation had not yet taken place. After the destruction of the universe, at the end of a great cycle, the Divine Mother garners the seeds for the next creation.

The Theory of Creation: Īśvara and the World

It is needless to mention here that the Master alluded to one of the most abstruse mysteries, which is common to the Tantra, the Vedānta, and to other spiritual disciplines sanctioned by the Vedas. The mystery is this: Everybody knows that the universe is not eternal. So, that which is impermanent will be destroyed one day. After the dissolution of the universe, from where can a new universe arise? It may be said that creation shall be actuated from within itself, that

is, God is both the efficient and material cause of the universe. But such a proposition admits diversity; and if the existence of diversity is admitted, it will vitiate the theory of Advaita. If it is not admitted then creation becomes impossible. So both the Tantra and the Vedānta admit that when the entire universe is dissolved, Īśvara garners the seeds of existence within Himself. And as the seeds are not different from the essence of God, the proposition does not suffer from the fallacy of the existence of two opposite things in the same receptacle. The sequence of creation has been described according to Advaita Vedānta in this manner: Brahman becomes Hiranyagarbha. It is as if the supreme Reality takes the shape of a person to create the world. Thus begins the process of creation, and the first stage of creation emanates from Hiranyagarbha. First the Veda emanates from Him. The Veda means the subtle form of the sum total of all knowledge, which crystallizes as ideas within Himself. Thereafter He gives gross shape to it following a certain order: 'From the Soul emanates the sky, from the sky emanates the air, the air produces fire, from the fire comes water, from water the earth is formed.'¹ Then arise the different objects in nature through the combination of the five elements. The creation that lay latent in Him is called the garnering of seeds of creation. The Primordial Power (Ādyāśakti) 'brings forth this phenomenal world from within Herself and then pervades it.' This is exemplified by the spinning of cobwebs by a spider. The Upanishad says: 'As the spider brings out its web from within its own body, and again takes it back within itself... so out of the Imperishable does the Universe emerge here.'²

The Being from which this world is born, by which it is sustained, and into which it dissolves at the end of the cycle, we call Brahman, or Īśvara. The act of creation by Īśvara is not like the potter creating earthenware. When a potter spins out earthenware he does not project them from within himself; he draws material from outside. Even if the potter ceases to exist, the existence of the earthenware created by him is not affected.

But the creation of the world is not like that. That is why the Upanishad says: 'Desire to know that from which all these beings take birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge. That is Brahman.'³

Therefore, the way the world is created, preserved, and is destroyed signifies that He is both the material and the efficient cause of creation. In the case of earthenware, the material cause is clay and the efficient cause is the potter. Owing to the potter's existence, the clay is transformed into earthenware. But in the case of creation of the universe, God alone exists and nothing else. There is no other material that He may transform, no tools to use, and no other substance that could form the content of His creation. That is why it is stated: 'Try to understand that Brahman is the source of everything, that everything is sustained by It, and that everything finally dissolves into It. This is Brahman.' By explaining the supreme Truth in this way, it follows that He is both the material and the efficient cause. So His creation is incomparable with any other ordinary creation. Only as a very poor analogy it can be compared with the cobweb of a spider or sparks of fire. It resembles to a certain extent the millions of sparks coming out of fire. The so-called material of the fire and its sparks are identical, but they appear different to us. But the analogies do not fully agree with the theory of creation; the similarities are only partial.

These examples may give us some idea about Brahman's creation of the world. Sri Ramakrishna said that the Divine Mother has created the world in the above manner. When there was no creation the Mother was formless. A devotee sings thus: 'Where didst Thou find Thy garland of heads before the universe was made?' The benevolent Mother adorned Herself with a garland of heads. Referring to that garland the devotee sings: 'Where did you get the garland of heads when the universe did not exist?' To us it appears to be impossible. But for Her who is Absolute and who abides

beyond our mind and intellect, everything is possible. This is the way she is looked upon by Her devotees.

There is yet another song:

Is Kālī, my Mother, really black?
The Naked One, of blackest hue,
Lights the lotus of the heart....

For ascertaining whether the Divine Mother is indeed black or not, we have to go to the Mother Herself. There is no other way.

God Is Infinite

When we conceive of the Divine Mother, we imagine Her form, Her colour, and so on, depending upon our way of thinking. However, when one completely merges with Her, one's perception does not tally with that of an ordinary aspirant performing sādhanā. For instance, different viewers have different impressions of the colour of a chameleon, but he who lives under the tree alone knows its true colour. He says that it has as many colours as we can see in it. Similarly, a devotee says: 'Whatever is revealed in one's mind is the limit of one's understanding.' Whatever thoughts or experiences one may have, one's intellect is limited to that. Therefore the Master said, 'We must not think that He is limited to whatever we understand of Him. We must keep in mind that what we perceive is His form. However, we should never think that He does not have forms other than that. We should never try to limit God.'

Bondage and Liberation

The Master next discussed bondage and liberation. He said: 'Bondage and liberation are both of Her making.' While thinking about it we wonder why She has created evil in the world. She could have as well avoided creating bondage. In

reply to that the Master said in that case the 'granny's' game of hide-and-seek could not continue. If Her play is to continue, then there has to be both good and evil. If all touch Her, then how can the game go on? Of course, if someone becomes tired while playing She extends Her hand to him. Now the point is, She may play but it costs us our lives. It is like the Aesop's fable in which the frogs say to the boys, 'It's play to you but death to us.' The Master explained this on a number of occasions in the *Gospel*. 'Those amongst you who say that it is death to us, tell me who you are. Are you other than Her?' If She plays sometimes with Her eyes covered, or sometimes with Her eyes open, does it amount to torturing anybody? The Master said, 'Alas! Rāma, you cause your own suffering!' He alone suffers when He puts Himself in bondage.

Even fools do not invite such sufferings on themselves. This is why the question arises: Doesn't She have the intelligence that even fools are credited with? It can only be replied in this way: She has, but She simply doesn't apply it. Her intelligence is beyond our comprehension. Because we fail to understand it, we call it Her sport. And we compare this sport with the play of small children and say: 'But Her creative activity is a mere pastime, as is seen in the world.' Like small children who build toy-houses, smash them, and then re-build them as they fancy, in the same way She creates, preserves, and destroys. In truth nothing exists other than Her. 'In the universe only I exist. Who else is there other than Me?' So when nothing exists other than the One, then we cannot say that She binds one or She frees others.

The Way to Liberation

Now if we do not like this bondage, there is a way out of it. If we earnestly pray with all our heart, She frees us from bondage. But there is no scope for the question, why has She created this variety? We don't know why She has created it. But we may pray: 'O Mother, whatever may be your sport in

this creation, kindly spare me from it.' Perhaps, She may then not hesitate to free us. But we cannot ask Her why She created such a universe. That is Her will! That is why She is called 'Self-willed'. She must always have Her own way and does not wait for our opinion about it. If we feel that this bondage is unbearable then we may search for the way to free ourselves. It is She, again, who has created the way out. But do we really intend to avail of it? She created this world and said: 'Go, my child, play now.' If we love the game and the toys, what is the harm? Keep playing! When the child is through with the game it cries for the mother. The toy does not satisfy it any more. Thus, the natural question that follows is, have the game and the toys become unbearable for us? If they have become so, then certainly there is a way out, and it is She who has designed it.

It is said in the *Katha Upanishad*: 'The self-existent Lord injured the senses by making them outgoing. Therefore, one sees things outside and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating person, desiring immortality, turns his eyes away and then sees the indwelling Self.'⁴ Therefore both are there. She provides a mind and winks at it, saying, 'Go and enjoy the world.' She also extends Her hands to us in the same way when we ardently seek Her. But are we really that ardent? Do we intend to go back to Her lap again? Many times we think that we do not want to return there because She has not given us the taste of immortality. We think it is because She has denied us that taste that we are drawn towards worldly objects. But these are mere words. It is because we are intensely attached to worldly objects that we do not get the taste of the Mother's love. We perhaps think that we have no duty in this regard, and that She can do what She pleases. We find in the *Devīsukta*: 'I make those whom I wish excel amongst all! I make one Brahma, a Rishi, and a supremely knowledgeable one.'⁵ I make one great and again degrade one if I so wish. The scriptures further say, 'Whomsoever She wants to raise, She makes him do good work.' Again, 'She

makes one do evil work whom She wants to degrade.' Now if She is the cause of every deed—noble as well as evil—then how are we to blame?

Ego: The Cause of Bondage

We are to blame only in thinking ourselves to be the doers. All our trouble starts when we replace Him by our own egoistic sense of being the doer. If we can always guide ourselves by the sense that it is He who is doing everything, then there is nothing to worry about. Then we shall be free while living (jīvanmukta). We want the good results that accrue from our deeds. However, if we say in case of bad results, 'It's He who has done this', then we are just deceiving ourselves. It is like the story of 'The Brahmin who killed the cow.' Though the story is known to many of us, we can repeat it once again. A brahmin had a beautiful garden. One day a cow entered it and chewed most of the good flower plants. The enraged brahmin beat the cow so much that it died. When the sin of killing the cow entered the brahmin, the brahmin said: 'Wait a while. I didn't commit this sin. The god of the hands is Indra, so, it was Indra who did it. I was just an instrument.' Then the sin went to Indra. Indra heard everything and asking the sin to wait, himself went to that garden in the disguise of an old brahmin. Reaching there, he started to praise the garden. This made the brahmin very happy and he took Indra and showed him around, claiming all credit, saying that he had done everything. As they walked along they reached the place where the dead cow lay. Indra feigned surprise and asked: 'Who killed the cow?' The brahmin was silent. So long he had been saying: 'I did this, I did that'. How could he say now that 'Indra did it'? He kept quiet. Then Indra revealed his identity and said: 'You hypocrite! For the good deeds you take the credit, but for killing the cow, Indra is to blame!'

Our situation is exactly like that. If we totally renounce our sense of doership then we shall not be responsible for any of our

acts, good or bad. But the moment we claim ourselves to be the doers and enjoyers, we shall have to accept all the results, good and bad, that accrue from our acts. Therefore, we should either assume full responsibility for our actions or leave it totally in the Divine Mother's hands. There cannot be a middle way. We are the ones who do everything, but when we run into difficulty we try to pass the buck and say that She has done it. This is not tenable. Often we hear: 'It is necessary to repeat God's name now and then. Well, if She makes us do it, we shall take Her name.' How is it that at the hour of taking food we do not say that? At that time we make the effort. Indeed, we are very earnest in doing so. But for remembering God's name we have excuses, 'Her grace permitting...'. This is plain laziness. We are deceiving our own mind. Without deceiving ourselves in this manner, if we can totally depend on Her, there will not be any occasion to lose faith in Her. It is She who will protect us from all difficulties, but only after we surrender totally and not before that. Well, if the play does not appear disagreeable to us, then let it continue. She will look after us, and that too, not as a passive onlooker. She may even clap Her hands in joy if one or two 'kites' can break free. She will never say: 'Oh! My play is done!'

Samsāra and Liberation: All Her Will

The Master then said: 'The Divine Mother is ever playful; this universe is Her play. She is self-willed and full of bliss. She gives freedom to one out of a hundred thousand.' Now the question is, if She is capable of freeing everybody, then why doesn't She do it? To that the Master replied: 'It is Her will. She wants to continue playing with Her created beings.' Again, the game will stop whenever She wishes. It is as if the Divine Mother signalled the human mind: 'Go and enjoy the world.' It is doing just that. So human beings are deluded by Her māyā and have become attached to the world.

Now comes a very serious question: 'Sir, can't we realize God without complete renunciation?' Seeing the all-renouncing

Sri Ramakrishna, it would be a natural question to arise in the mind. One feels insignificant, coming in contact with one who has totally renounced the world. Therefore, the question arises whether He will remain forever beyond our reach if we do not totally renounce the world. And we may feel that as it is impossible for us to renounce the world totally, we shall never attain Him. The Master said laughingly—he laughed because he knew our limitations: ‘Of course you can! Why should you renounce everything? You are all right as you are, following the middle path—like molasses, partly solid and partly liquid.’ He also referred to the game of nax. In this card-game anyone scoring more than seventeen points has to retire. The Master said: ‘Having scored the maximum number of points, I am out of the game.’ He said further: ‘I tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world.’ By seeing a person like Sri Ramakrishna who has renounced everything, we feel that it would be nice to be in such a state. We don’t realize that such a state is not meant for all, but the Master knew it. That is why he said, ‘There is nothing wrong in being in the world.’ But then one must direct one’s mind towards God. Regarding this the Master never made any compromise. It is foolish to expect that God will draw us to Himself while we continue to live as we wish. Therefore he said: ‘But you must direct your mind toward God; otherwise you will not succeed.’ There is nothing wrong with being in the world, but it is wrong to be attached to the world and remain absorbed in it, forgetting God.

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—*Taittirīya Upanishad, 2.1.1*

2. *Yathornanābhīh srijate grihnate cha... tathā'aksharāt
sambhavatiha viśvam.*

— *Mundaka Upanishad, 1.1.7*

3. *Yato vā imāni bhutāni jāyante. Yena jātāni jīvanti. Yat
prayantyabhisamviśanti. Tadvijijnāsasva. Tad brahmeti.*

— *Tattirīya Upanishad, 3.1.1*

4. *Parānchi khāni vyatrinat svayambhuh,
tasmāt parāngpaśyati nāntarātman.*

*Kaśchiddhīrah pratyagātmānamaikshad,
āvrittachakshuramritattvam icchan.*

— *Katha Upanishad, 2.1.1*

5. *Yam kāmaye tam tamugram krinomi
Tam brahmānam tamrishim tam sumedhām.*

— *Devīsukta, 5*

CHAPTER 12

The Gospel (October 27, 1882)

Faith in God's Name

Sri Ramakrishna was speaking untiringly about God to Keshab and other Brāhmo devotees. The Master said, 'Bondage is of the mind, and freedom is also of the mind.' If a person can say to his mind with a firm determination that he is free, he indeed becomes free. If, on the other hand, he continuously thinks that he is a sinner or a bound soul, he indeed becomes a bound soul. The Master said: 'One should have such burning faith in God's name that one can say: What? I have repeated the name of God, and can sin still cling to me?' Saying this, he cited the example of the orthodox brahmin Krishnakishore. 'What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had! Once while at Vrindāvan, he felt thirsty and went to a well. Near it he saw a man standing. On being asked to draw a little water for him, the man said: "I belong to a low caste, sir. You are a brāhmin. How can I draw water for you?" Krishnakishore said: "Take the name of Śiva. By repeating His holy name you will make yourself pure." The low caste man did as he was told, and Krishnakishore, orthodox brāhmin that he was, drank the water.' The Master further advised: 'Say but once: O Lord, I have undoubtedly done wicked things, but I won't repeat them.' These two things should occur simultaneously: If one can truly surrender to Him and repeat His name with faith, then He will deliver us from all sins. But at the same time one should bear in mind that he who depends on Him and takes

refuge in Him does not follow an evil path. If somebody follows an evil path and claims: 'I take His name, so I am pure, I am free,' then it is to be understood that he does not take His name properly, nor does he have faith in His name. Thus he is neither pure nor free. Our actions will determine our true character.

Taking Refuge in God

It is said in the *Bhāgavata* that one who has taken refuge in Him shall never err. In the language of the Master: 'He never takes a false step.' 'One who takes refuge in God never errs. He will not slip or fall down while running on the highways of samsāra, even if his two eyes are blindfolded.' The Master said: 'The son who holds on to his father, while walking along the narrow ridge of a paddy field, may slip if he absent-mindedly lets go of his father's hand; but if the father holds the son by the hand, there is no such danger.' If it is seen that a devotee slips too often, then it is to be known that his devotion does not come from his heart. This is because if his devotion were truly pure, then God would have protected him. He would not have allowed him to slip. 'O son of Prithā, for them who have their minds absorbed in Me, I become, without delay, the Deliverer from the sea of the world which is fraught with death.'¹ He always keeps His promise. But if one surrenders to Him, it has to be total, without keeping anything back.

Girish and the Power of Attorney

Girish felt relieved by giving the power of attorney to the Master. He thought, 'My troubles are over.' Sometime later, Girish told the Master that he was to go somewhere. The Master said, 'Look here, haven't you given the power of attorney to me? How is it that you say: I'll do this or that?' Then Girish came to his senses: 'Truly, I have already given the power of attorney. Now I cannot consider matters partly as my

work and partly his. Where it is gratifying to my sense of ego I will do that and leave the difficult portion for him—this cannot work.' That is why the scriptures say that one has to totally surrender oneself with single-minded dedication. Anything short of complete dedication will not do. Instead, if we work partly 'this way' and partly 'that way' it will only betray our lack of sincerity for either. That is why it is said that to 'those persons who, becoming non-different from Me and meditative, worship Me everywhere...'² He provides full protection. So one has to be single-minded and totally surrender oneself. The Master made Girish understand this in its true sense. Girish said later: 'Did I know then that so much lay hidden in this simple giving of the power of attorney?' He had to watch at every step and at every breath, whether in all his thoughts and deeds he was depending on Him and His powers or on his wretched 'I'. The Master also repeatedly said, 'He will force one to do whatever is necessary for attaining Him, there's no letting off.' That is why the Master had his close disciples practise austere spiritual disciplines to establish the truth that: He is not easily achievable. But if a person depends on Him, He makes him to do all that is necessary to attain Him.

Sri Ramakrishna next observed that because of the strong influence of Christianity, the Brāhmo Samāj laid great emphasis on sin, sinner, and so on. The Master did not like this. In this regard he observed time and again: 'If a man repeats the name of God, his body, mind, and everything will become pure. Why should one talk only about sin and hell, and such things?' It shows that one lacks faith in God's name. There is a story in one of the Purāṇas. A king went to a sage's cottage after killing a brahmin. He wanted to know the atonement for such a sin. The sage was away at that time and his son was present. The latter advised him, 'So, you've come after killing a brahmin. Well, repeat the name of Lord Rāma three times and you will be cleansed of the sin.' When the sage returned, his son told him everything. Hearing everything the

sage said, 'What have you done? Taking Rāma's name once amends the sin of killing millions of brahmins. Why have you made him repeat the name three times? When taking the name of Rāma only once cleanses the sin of millions of such murders, how could you have made him do it three times? Wasn't once good enough?' That is why the Master says that those who take the name of God so much and yet talk about sin, have no faith in God's name.

We shall have to establish such a relationship with God that we become His children and heirs to His limitless spiritual treasures. We can then stake our claim on His holiness, His purity, and His limitless being. The Master says that no objection can be made to such claims. That is why he sang:

If only I can pass away repeating Durgā's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be? ...

If we repeat His name then liberation is well within our grasp. But if we continue to worry even after doing so, then it is to be understood that we have neither faith nor devotion in His name.

Pure Devotion

Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother for pure, unconditional devotion, which is not tainted with the prayer for the fulfilment of any desire—even the desire for deliverance. One possessed of such devotion does not have to pray for anything in this world. Normally we regard God as a means to achieve something. We pray, 'O God, deliver me from the danger that has befallen me. O God, give me this, give me that, etc.' But with pure devotion it is just the opposite. There we have nothing to ask for except God Himself. 'O Lord, I do not ask for anything. I need you and you alone. I want to love you, with unconditional love, love that doesn't desire any worldly

gain.' That is why Sri Ramakrishna offered everything at the feet of the Divine Mother—purity and impurity, virtue and vice, dharma and adharma. He sought only devotion.

Rāmprasād described the world as a mere 'framework of illusion'. But if one acquires pure love for His lotus feet, then this world itself becomes a 'mansion of mirth'. When one sees the impermanence of this world, one takes it as unreal, illusory, and a 'framework of illusion'. But when our faith is firmly established that this world is nothing but the Supreme Being, that nothing exists other than that One, and that whatever we see is nothing but Brahman in essence, then even while living within this world we can enjoy the divine sport of God. And then this world turns into a 'mansion of mirth'. Then there is no scope for worry that this world shall bind us or take us away from God.

The Master said that once when he sat for meditation with his eyes closed, he thought, 'How is it that by closing the eyes one finds Him, and by opening the eyes He ceases to exist?' Then he thought: 'Why should one have to meditate on Him by closing one's eyes? Doesn't He exist within and without, everywhere? Does anything exist in the world apart from Him?' In the *Gītā* the Lord has said: '... There is nothing moving or non-moving which can exist without Me'.³ He is immanent in each and every particle of the universe. In each and every dust particle He abides in His fullness—not partly or only in a minute form. Can the One who is Indivisible, or Immutable be divided into parts? When a person is established in such a state of realization, how can any object in the world delude him? The Upanishad says: 'What sorrow and what delusion can there be for that seer of oneness?'⁴

The Master said that it was true that King Janaka was both a jñānī and a karma yogī. He was firmly established in the Truth, and again he behaved like an ordinary person of this world. A king and a householder, he did not renounce this world and go to the forest. Thus there was no contradiction between his knowledge and his living in the world. Having

said this the Master added: 'But one cannot be a King Janaka all of a sudden.'

Living in Solitude and Sādhanā

Often we cite the example of King Janaka and say that we shall live in this world and also meditate on God. But it is not that easy to be always firmly established in God. It demands a lot of spiritual practice. King Janaka practised much austerity in solitude and only after that did he come to be known as 'King Janaka the jnāni'. Even if one has to lead a worldly life, one must go into solitude now and then. It is good if one weeps for God even for three days in solitude. But we must bear in mind that living in solitude does not mean living in isolation just for the sake of it. If that were so, prisoners in solitary confinement would become the greatest spiritual personalities. But that does not happen. The need for solitude arises because as long as we do not live in solitary places and confront our own mind, we cannot understand its power to distract us from our goal. Those who float with the current cannot understand how forceful it is. Only when they try to move against the current do they realize its strength. In the same way, those who practise spiritual disciplines know fully well that however intensely they may try to concentrate their mind on their chosen deity, the mind will wander here and there with the same intensity, leaving the object of meditation. It is not possible to come to terms with such a mind so long we live in this ever-distracting world. That is why the Master advised the Brāhmos to 'meditate on God after going to a solitary place.' Why choose a solitary place? Because there the possibility of the mind's being distracted will be less. Therefore, only in seclusion we can know the real nature of our mind; we can observe where our mind waylays us and in how many ways it deludes us. In a solitary place the cause for distraction is absent, and thus we may establish an undisturbed relationship with God. Living constantly in the din and bustle of this

world, it becomes impossible to calm the mind and fix it on God. So one has to wait for a respite and when such a respite is available one should train one's mind to think of God in seclusion. Repeated practice (abhyāsa) generates a taste, an attraction for God, and fills the mind with a sense of bliss—a bliss that is totally different from worldly pleasures. It is but natural to enjoy worldly objects; because the natural flow of the mind is towards that. But our sense organs are not naturally inclined towards divine bliss. Therefore, in order to direct our mind towards God, it is necessary to fight with our mind, keep on trying our best, and practise regularly. Slowly, we will get the taste of divine bliss.

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Bhavāmi na chirāt Pārtha mayyāveśitachetasām.*
— *Gītā*, 12.7
2. *Ananyāśchintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate ...*
— *Gītā*, 9.22
3. *Na tadasti vinā yatsyānmayā bhutam charācharam.*
— *Gītā*, 10.39
4. *Tatra ko mohah kah śoka ekatvamanupaśyatah.*
— *Isā Upanishad*, 7

CHAPTER 13

The Gospel (October 27, 1882)

A Difference of Opinion between Keshab and Vijay

Sri Ramakrishna was in a steamer on the Ganges with Keshab. Ceaseless discussion on God was going on. The Master was trying to clear the misunderstanding that had developed between Keshab and Vijaykrishna Goswami. Keshab and Vijay had previously been very intimate. Later on, owing to differences of opinion, Vijay left the Brāhmo Samāj and was on his own. As a consequence, their followers developed factions. The Master wanted to resolve their quarrel, so he said: '...Your quarrel is like the fight between Śiva and Rāma. Śiva was Rāma's guru. Though they fought with each other, they soon came to terms. But the grimaces of the ghosts, the followers of Śiva, and the gibberish of the monkeys, the followers of Rāma, would not come to an end!' The Master also said that such differences of opinion between the guru and his disciples were not new. Rāmānuja disagreed with his guru. But the guru-disciple relationship is like a father-son relationship. Whatever may be their differences outside, they are deeply united in their hearts.

Next, the Master explained to Keshab why people broke away from the latter's organization: Keshab did not look into their nature before making them his disciples. Needless to say, the cause for the split in Keshab's organization was the marriage of Keshab's daughter at an early age to the prince of Coochbehar. As the leader of the organization, Keshab himself

broke its rule of not to marry their daughters when they were young. There ensued a bitter controversy. As a result, Vijaykrishna Goswami and some others left the organization and formed a new group.

The Absence of Ego in Sri Ramakrishna

In the course of the Master's discussion about Keshab as a guru, the Master said that his nature was different: 'As for myself, I eat, drink, and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows. Indeed, there are three words that prick my flesh: "guru", "master" and "father".' In other words, he never had any such feeling as, 'I am the guru.' This sense of being a guru inflates one's ego, and this inflated ego causes one's downfall. It is seen that the teacher-ego makes one more zealous in guiding others than in striving to perfect oneself. The position is so aptly described in the *Katha Upanishad*: 'Just like the blind being led by the blind.'¹ The Master cautioned Keshab against this. At the same time he spoke about his own state: 'A tool in the hands of the Divine Mother. As She uses him, he moves accordingly.' How difficult it is to help others through a path which is unknown and whose principle is most abstruse! Before we help others in such a path we should ask ourselves whether we are infallible. If we are not infallible ourselves then how can we ensure that our directions to others will be flawless? That is why the Master advised Keshab to leave everything to Her.

'A man can teach others only if God reveals Himself to him and gives the command.' Then God establishes Himself in the person and leads others. The guru then does not have any authority. The authority rests with God. The human guru acts as the medium. If God does not bless us with the command to lead others, then our words do not carry any force. Hearing Jesus Christ preaching, a person said: 'For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'² He spoke so forcefully that one felt as if he was divinely ordained to preach.

Teacher-disciple Relationship

The Master further said: 'There is only one Guru, and that is Satchidānanda.' The scriptures also say this. When we utter the mantra '*Gururbrahmā, gururvishnu, gururdevo Maheśvarah*' while saluting our guru, then we do not mean that our guru, Mr. So-and-so, is Brahmā, Vishnu, or Maheśvara. We should understand the significance of the scriptures in the following way: The individual, Mr. So-and-so is not the guru. The guru is Satchidānanda Himself. Perhaps He offers His grace and blessings through a medium, say, an individual. But this act of offering blessings is fulfilled only when the medium is pure. If, however, the medium is vitiated with impurities, then the blessings cannot flow uninterruptedly. A disciple must judge the worth, competence, and weaknesses of a person before formally choosing him as his guru. The scriptures advise this. The scriptures also state that one has to associate with him or her, and judge the behaviour of the person to be chosen as the guru.

The same process of examination and screening also applies to those who aspire to become disciples. If the guru does not have the required authority, he will fail to guide and monitor the disciple properly. Again, if the disciple does not possess the required qualities he will not be able to make any headway. The guru, himself being a person of immaculate character, must, out of compassion for the disciple, try his best to help the latter in reaching the goal. It must be carefully seen that this relationship is not tainted with any give-and-take consideration and does not degenerate into a business. The scriptures have prescribed that a guru should be well versed in the scriptures, and must have the knowledge of Brahman. His life should reflect the scriptural injunctions, and he must be established in them. He must not establish a desire-induced relationship with his disciples, and must have totally effaced his sense of ego. A guru displays his blatant incompetence when, with his fully blown ego, he says to his disciples: 'Hear

me! I am preaching to you! This is how I direct you and you should act according to my instructions.' The guru should think of himself as only a medium; it is just like a clay image being a symbol during worship. Even as the clay image is not the deity, the individual as a receptacle is only a medium of expression of the guru-power; he is not the guru. So the Master said: 'There is only one Guru, and that is Satchidānanda.' That 'the guru is Brahmā, Vishnu, and Śiva' is possible only from this standpoint. When one is born as a human being, there is bound to be some imperfection. A limited and imperfect human being can never be the Supreme Brahman. Everyone should understand this clearly. It should be specially realized by one who is in the exalted position of a guru. As Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

The path feels I am the lord,
the chariot thinks it's but me.
The deity thinks I am the lord,
the Lord looks on with a smile.

The path, the chariot, and the deity each thinks itself to be the object of veneration. The Lord smiles and knows how awfully mistaken they are.

There is a story in one of the Upanishads of how the gods became proud after achieving victory over the demons. Brahman came to know about the pride of the gods and appeared in a wonderful form (Yaksha) before them to remove their vanity. The gods failed to recognize Him. They sent Agni (Fire) to ascertain who He might be.

Looking at Agni He asked, 'Who are you?' That hurt the pride of Agni who said: 'Look, I am Agni, Jātavedā, known to all created beings!' He said: 'So I understand you have several names—big and small. But what can you do?' 'I can burn the entire universe to ashes!' 'Is it so, really? Well, try this little piece of straw.' Agni tried his utmost to burn it, but failed even to touch it with a flicker. He returned hanging his head in shame. Then Vāyu (the god of Air) was sent. Vāyu also met

with the same fate. Finally Indra, the King of the gods appeared. To inflict severe humiliation on him Brahman disappeared. As Indra stood there ashamed, there appeared Umā Haimavati. She said: 'He who appeared before you and whom you failed to recognize, is the Supreme Brahman. In the war against the demons it was He who earned the victory. You should not have taken credit for that.' In the same way, we shall err if we presume that any work is done through our strength. Intrinsically we do not have any strength of our own. Behind us stands He who is the source of all strength and who makes us move. It is like a puppet play where the dolls are made to move and dance by pulling strings from above. The Master gave an example: 'There is fire under the pot, so the rice and pulse and potatoes and other vegetables jump about inside. They jump about as if to say: "We are here! We are jumping!" ... Take away the fuel and all becomes quiet.' As stated in *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*: 'He who inhabits all beings but is within them, whom no being knows, whose body is all beings, and who controls all beings from within, is the Internal Ruler, your own immortal Self.'³

His power causes everything; He controls everything from within. But we do not know Him, and because we do not know Him we err in presuming that we are the doers. To put oneself in the position of the doer is but avidyā, ignorance. That is why the Master used to repeat: 'Not I, not I, but Thou'. Until such time comes when we understand this, He will not manifest Himself in us. We shall simply continue in the cycle of births and deaths like a blindfolded ox moving round and round.

Therefore, so long as He does not give the command, one should not take upon oneself the title of a guru. When the Master asked pundit Sashadhar Tarkachudamani if he had received a divine command, he was rather disconcerted. The Master then said, 'Unless you have a command from God, your words will not carry any force.' In such a case nobody will say: 'For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'

God-realization and Doing Good to the World

Next, the Master asked: 'You people speak of doing good to the world. Is the world such a small thing? And who are you, pray, to do good to the world? First realize God, see Him by means of spiritual discipline. If He imparts power, then you can do good to others, otherwise not.' Very often we fancy that we can do good to this world. Such ambition is nothing but the projection of our subtle ego in an attractive form. Jesus Christ once beautifully said: 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'⁴ Often we become eager to do good to others without ever thinking about our own condition. So the Master said: 'Whose world is this? Has He become incapable of doing good to this world so that you have to assist Him?' Besides, what do we know about doing good that we think we should do good to this world? 'The individual self is very small, as small as a hundredth part of the end of a hair divided again by a hundred.'⁵ That tiny, insignificant jīva (living being) gloats in the pride of doing good to others! What a preposterous, self-conceited idea it is to think, that we will do good to this world and the entire world will await our help like a beggar!

That is why the Master reacted sharply on hearing the words 'compassion to living beings!' 'Compassion? Who are you to show compassion? Say service to living beings.' Realizing that He abides in all living beings, one should serve others. If we are able to accept this idea, then all our activities will be transformed into sādhanā. Otherwise, if we approach living beings to show our compassion, our ego will be inflated to the size of the Himalayas and crush us under its weight. Swamiji, who was so eloquent about Karma Yoga also said: 'The world is like a dog's curly tail. We pull it and think we

have been able to straighten it, but the moment we release it, it takes its usual form.'

Service to Living Beings

Truly this world is a school, and we have come here to learn. If we work with such an attitude, then only may we gain something, otherwise not. 'Jagannatha's chariot moves of its own force. It does not require your strength. You can at best sanctify your life by touching its rope.' So it is vanity to think that we will do good to this world by social reforms or varieties of other philanthropic acts. God is kind in providing us the opportunity of coming into this world, to consecrate our lives by doing these things. Let such acts be done in the spirit of service and not out of the feeling of compassion. That is why Swamiji said: 'Let the poor be your God, let the ignorant be your God.' He abides everywhere. Serve Him in different places in different ways as necessary. We have to cultivate the feeling that God Himself is present in all places to accept our worship. He has assumed a particular form, as He wants us to serve Him in that form. When the devotional scriptures teach us to worship God everywhere, it is in this way that we should do it. So do not worship Garuda (the celestial carrier of Lord Vishnu) by placing it on the alter; you will only be creating problems if you do so. And our service must not be limited to human beings alone. Let it be extended to all beings. Perform worship according to the requirement of different places. If we act in this way then all our actions and deeds will become His worship, His adoration!

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— *Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.5

2. Bible, St. Matthew 7.29

3. *Yah sarveshu bhuteshu tisthan, Sarvebhyo bhutebhyo antarah,
Yam sarvāni bhutāni na viduh, Yasya sarvāni bhutāni
śarīram, Yah sarvāni bhutānyantaro yamayati, esha ta ātmā
antaryamyamritaha...*

— *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad, 3.7.15*

4. Bible, St. Matthew, 7. 3–5

5. *Vālāgraśatabhāgasya śatadhā kalpitasya cha bhāgo jīvah.*

— *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad, 5.9*

CHAPTER 14

The Gospel (October 27, 1882)

Keshab and other devotees were enjoying the steamer ride on the Ganges with the Master. Discussion on God and divine matters continued.

Teaching People: A Difficult Task

The Master said: 'It is extremely difficult to teach others. A man can teach only if God reveals Himself to him and gives the command.' Otherwise, his words will not carry any force nor will they be coherent. When we try to explain the infinite using our limited intelligence, then quite naturally our expressions will be inconsistent. The Master spoke about pundit Samadhyayi to illustrate the point. 'Pundit Samadhyayi once said in the course of his sermon, "God is dry. Make Him sweet with your love and devotion." Imagine! To describe Him as dry, whom the Vedas declare as the Essence of Bliss! It makes one feel that the pundit didn't know what God really is. That is why his words were incoherent.' The Master further stated by way of example: 'A man once said, "There are many horses in my uncle's cowshed." From that one could know that the man had no horses at all. No one keeps a horse in a cowshed.' Such inconsistencies surface only when we say something based on our own reasoning. For instance, a person was once singing at Belur Math: 'I get only fleeting glimpses of You at times, O Lord. Why not Your abiding vision?' Hearing the song a senior monk said: 'Mere effusive words without any

realization! That's what makes one sing like that. When even a momentary glimpse of that Truth transforms life, to say why one does not get "abiding vision!"

In the *Bhāgavata* there is this story: Nārada was then only five years old. His only worldly bondage was his mother. After his mother's death he was filled with intense renunciation and renounced the world. One day he sat down under a tree and was in deep meditation. Soon he felt the presence of God in his heart and was filled with bliss. After a while God disappeared. His heart yearning acutely, he prayed intensely for the reappearance of God. Then he heard a divine voice: 'Nārada, your entire life will be filled with the bliss of what you have realized. Now go about singing and chanting the name and attributes of God. Your life will be sanctified thereby.' That one moment's vision of God brought fulfilment for his entire life. Such is the experience of one who has realized the ultimate, the feeling of an illumined devotee. It is not mere poetry. It is experience. So one is competent to teach people only if he is ordained by the Lord's direct command, and not otherwise. As regards teaching others, it is to be seen how a teacher looks upon himself and how he evaluates his own work. There's nothing wrong if he discusses divine matters just for the sake of discussions, completely shedding the conceit of being a teacher. But if it comes from an 'I teach thou' syndrome, then it is nothing but ignorance.

In the *Bhāgavata* it is said that the wives of Sri Krishna were once having a discussion amongst themselves; the topic was about the specific attributes of God which attracted each one of them towards Him. One by one they were narrating their personal experiences. It should be noted here that in this there was a beauty and naturalness, but no expression of pride. It would have been vanity only if they had asserted that God was that alone, and not otherwise. God is infinite. Limitless are the varieties in Him and infinite are His attributes. So this discussion was not to teach anyone; it was purely an exchange of ideas amongst themselves. There was nothing blameable

about it. It becomes vanity when one haughtily advises people like a guru: 'Listen to what I say.'

The Duty of Householders

One of the devotees asked: 'Then, sir, must we give up our activities until we realize God?' The Master replied: 'No. Why should you? You must engage in such activities as contemplation, singing His praises, and other daily devotions.' One should engage in these activities because these are the means to reach Him. But one should withdraw as far as possible from other activities which are incompatible with these. Then the Brāhmo devotee enquired: 'But what about our worldly duties—duties associated with our earning money, and so on?' The Master said: 'Yes, you can perform them too, but only as much as you need for your livelihood.' But involvement in worldly affairs should not be such that it will not allow us to think of God's name for even a moment. Worldly activities are a part of human life. One has to spend sometime to discharge worldly duties. But due care should be taken to see that such work does not take all our time. To work forgetting God is contrary to the ideal. Rather, work should help us in attaining Him. So the Master advised householders: 'Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold on to God.' These words are very important, so important that they are worth contemplating over and over again. This is because most of us lead a worldly life and remain busy with our worldly activities, so we often feel that amidst our hectic life, we are forgetting Him. Naturally doubts arise in our mind, and we wonder: 'What is the way out?' Time and again the Master has shown the way. Nobody ever found any trace of despondency in him. He was singularly optimistic that one and all would achieve the goal. What is wanted is sincerity. 'So long as you are burdened with worldly duties do your duty with one hand and with the other, hold on to God. When He frees you from responsibilities, then you must hold on to God with both hands.'

Doing Good to the World

Nowadays many people say that doing good to the world should get first priority. This is the reflection of the psyche of modern society. In this regard the Master said: 'Is the world such a small thing? And who are you, pray, to do good to the world?' He whose creation is all this will do whatever is needful. Why should we worry about it? If we think a little deeply we may find the true reason of our being unusually driven to help the world: Is it really true that we are driven by compassion for the suffering people all around, or is it something else? Delving further into 'something else', is it not likely that we may stumble upon in our hidden egotism a desire to acquire name and fame? If one works with such a motive it will lead him towards the acquisition of name and fame and distract him from the goal. The error does not lie in the work. It lies in not adopting the proper attitude to the work. The correct attitude is to hold on to Him while working so that the goal of human life is not swept away by the current of work. In a similar situation the Master once asked Shambhu Mullick: 'Suppose God appears before you; then will you ask Him to build hospitals and dispensaries for you?' Why did he say this? The works referred to here are indeed good. But doesn't it appear like going after pieces of glass, leaving aside the pearls, and thus giving precedence to a couple of hospitals and dispensaries over the bliss of God realization? He is most important. He is supreme—all other things come later. So he said: 'Coming to Kālighāt... first of all manage somehow to see the image of the Divine Mother, even by pushing through the crowd. Then you may or may not give alms, as you wish. You may give to the poor to your heart's content, if you feel that way.' The idea is, we should never forget that we have come to the world to attain Him, to enjoy the bliss of God realization.

In the *Gospel*, we find an incident. On the occasion of the Master's birthday a devotee named Bhavanath came to

Dakshineshwar but wanted to leave early to attend a meeting relating to the welfare of working men. The Master exclaimed: 'It's his bad luck. A stream of bliss will flow here today. He could have enjoyed it. But how unlucky!' Sri Ramakrishna was sad. Why? Bhavanath was no doubt leaving for a good purpose. But though the purpose was good, to the Master it was like missing a golden opportunity on the plea of attending welfare work, disregarding the opportunity of participating in the stream of divine bliss that would flow there.

The Motto of the Ramakrishna Mission

When Swamiji laid down the motto of the Ramakrishna Mission as —'For one's own salvation and for the good of the world,'—he added the ideal of the welfare of the world with that of one's struggle for liberation. He placed the same ideal before sannnyāsīs and householders alike. Often doubts arise in the minds of many: Is it not likely to affect our efforts of seeking liberation if we pursue the activities for the good of the world? Once a monk wrote to Swami Turiyananda (Hari Maharaj) with the hope of getting his support for declaring welfare activities as of no value, since he thought Hari Maharaj used to stress more on renunciation and discrimination. He wrote: 'Maharaj, since I feel that any kind of activity brings egoism in its train, I would like to remain free from all activity.' Hari Maharaj wrote back: 'Do you think if you just abstain from all activity, your ego will disappear?' We should understand this point very clearly that the way a human being is created, with various mental modes, he should consciously try to direct his mind towards God through all these modes. As we have an in-built instrument, the mind, to think, we should contemplate on Him with its help, and also serve Him through all our sense organs. Swamiji repeatedly said: 'If service to God is confined within the bounds of image worship, then we only limit our service to Him.'

The Message of the Bhāgavata

It has been very clearly stated in the *Bhāgavata*: 'One who worships God in images alone [reverentially, of course, because otherwise, one would not be a devotee at all] but shows no consideration to His devotees and other fellow beings—he is the devotee of the lowest type (prākṛita bhakta).¹ He is called prākṛita because he is very strongly influenced by this phenomenal world. As regards the best devotee it has been stated: 'He who sees the Ātman in all creatures as a glory of the worshipful Supreme Lord, and sees all creatures as grounded in the Lord, the Soul of all—he is the best among the devotees.'² As the Self is dear to him, so are all living beings. Just as God in the image is adorable, so also is the Lord, immanent in all beings, adorable. That is why the Master did not care for the expression 'Compassion to living beings'. He said instead, 'Service to living beings.' Hearing this, Swamiji said to others: 'What a strange light I have discovered in those wonderful words of the Master!... Well, if the Lord wills, the day will come when I shall proclaim this grand truth before the world at large.' That is why the Master brought Swamiji along with him and trained him as his exclusive instrument. As a result, a new path of sādhanā was initiated in spiritual life. The concept of working for the welfare of the world was there earlier also; but, perhaps, never before was it so explicitly said that service to all living beings is service to God. Though there is reference to this in the *Bhāgavata*, nowhere else, perhaps, can one find such clear instructions in the matter of its application as a spiritual sādhanā. Therefore the Master said: '...Why shouldn't it be so? If God can be worshipped through an image, why not through a living being?' It is in the human form that He is manifest more than in any other living being. Because in a human form one gets the opportunity to attain Him and attain oneness with Him. From this perspective, the supremacy of a human being is unquestionable. A human being can go so far as to realize his unity with God.

Human Birth and Self-realization

It is for this reason that the Upanishads have placed human beings in an exalted position. The *Katha Upanishad* states: 'As (one sees) in a mirror, so in one's intellect; as in a dream, so in the world of the manes; as it is seen in water, so in the world of the Gandharvas. As it is in the case of shade and light, so in the world of Brahmā.'³ How is the Self realized in this world? As perfectly as one sees a reflection in a mirror. In the world of the manes the vision is indistinct; as in a dream. In the world of the Gandharvas it is seen hazily; like a reflection in water. Only in the world of Brahmā is the vision very distinct; as in the case of shade and light.

Brahmaloka (the world of Brahmā) is the realm where human purity has excelled even that of the gods. The comparison is drawn with that world, so one can easily understand how exalted the position of this world is. How clear is His manifestation in the human form. So instead of worshipping Him there, if we offer our adoration only at places with an insignificant manifestation, then our worship will remain incomplete. Thus we should work with the spirit of adoring Him everywhere through all our actions. When we serve somebody we should feel that we are fortunate for having had the opportunity to serve. Let us place him who requires our service in a higher position, while relegating ourselves to the position of servants. Our work will then become flawless and our mind will not be drawn away from God. Moreover, all our actions, instead of becoming fetters, will become means to salvation.

REFERENCES

1. *Archāyāmeva haraye puṣām yah śraddhayehate,
Na tadbhakteshu chānyeshu sa bhaktah prākṛitah smṛitah.*
— *Bhāgavata*, 11.2.47

2. *Sarvabhuteshu yah paśyed bhagavadbhāvamātmanah,
Bhūtāni bhagavatyātmanyasha bhāgavatottamah.*

— *Bhāgavata*, 11.2.45

3. *Yathā'darshe tathā'tmani yathā swapne tathā pitriloke;
yathā'psu parīva dadrishe tathā gandharvaloke; chāyā-
tapayoriva brahmaloke.*

— *Katha Upanishad*, 2.3.5

CHAPTER 15

The Gospel (October 28, 1882)

The Master had come to attend the Brāhmo festival being held at Benimadhav Pal's beautiful garden-house. From the description of the garden-house given by M. one feels that it was a wonderful place for sādhanā. News of the Master's visit had drawn people, and there was a large gathering of devotees. The Master arrived smiling and took his seat. We should specially remember this description. Let us imagine: the house where the festivities are being held, the garden overflowing with devotees, and the Master makes his way in and takes his seat with a smile on his serene face. Everybody is looking at him with attention. It is needless to say that M. drew the picture after meditating on the scene. The picture has been drawn in this way to enable us to envision the same scene in our minds, so that we too can meditate on it.

Seeing Shivanath, the Master cried out joyfully: 'Ah! Here is Shivanath! You see, you are a devotee of God. The very sight of you gladdens my heart. One hemp-smoker feels very happy to meet another.'

The Master said: 'A devotee feels happy to meet another devotee.' Indeed, that is the reason why the Master came here. The Brāhmo devotees were opposed to the traditional Hindu religion. Nonetheless they had great sincerity, and this attracted the Master to them.

Ordinary Human Beings

Thereafter he said: 'If I see some among the visitors indifferent to God, I say to them, "You had better sit over there." Or sometimes I say, "Go and see the beautiful buildings."'

We know that in a large gathering all people do not have the same disposition. Naturally, those who were devoted enjoyed the presence of the Master and listened to his words attentively. But those who were of a different temperament naturally did not like such discussions. Such aversion is but natural, we realize this if we only look around. Only a handful of persons amongst thousands, perhaps, find pleasure in talking about God. To most other people it is but a source of irritation. In couplet of Tulsidās it is stated: 'One vends milk from door to door but sells liquor seated at one place.' Drawn by their addiction, people come and buy liquor. The people of Calcutta know very well that it is difficult to walk down streets where there are cinema or theatre halls. Almost throughout the day the roads are crowded. But, how many people go to hear discourses on God? Maybe a curious person peeps in: 'Well, let's see why so many have crowded there.' If he finds devotional songs (kīrtan) being sung, he may feel disappointed and say: 'Oh, it's just kīrtan. We would have preferred a street-fight instead of singing.' This is human nature. It is, perhaps, beyond the capacity of ordinary human beings to enjoy the bliss of God. Rather, if somebody does so, he becomes a laughing-stock.

When we used to frequent Belur Math in our younger days people made sarcastic comments: 'What makes you visit monks at your age? What's there after all?' What else should we do then? At that age boys go to the playgrounds for play. It is also common practice that as one gets older one indulges in games like chess, card-playing, and so on. What is more, even in old age, perhaps, one does not find time to discuss religious matters; one remains deeply attached to worldly affairs. If we

listen to any group of elderly people talking we will find that they are ruminating over the same things they spent their entire life talking about. It is necessary that this changes and to induce that change a congenial atmosphere should be developed. In order to achieve that, fixed areas should be made at different places for discussions on God and divine matters, so that people, even if only two of them, are able to discuss religious matters and strengthen their ideas. Looking at those people, others too may feel drawn towards the discussion. We have often seen that some even amongst us complain: 'Not many people come here.' As a reply someone else suggests a way out: 'Come, let's fight amongst ourselves. Instantly the place will be crowded.' The purpose is to draw people to spiritual matters. But there is no use in drawing people towards God by alluring them with other things. Be it in the West or in our country, not many people come to religious places, so the loudspeakers are switched on to the highest decibel. If it is a public function then no one questions it. The natural tendency of the mind is to be drawn to noise. Hence the need for such dubious devices. But even if only a couple of persons live exalted lives, emulating great ideas, and if they are sincere enough, then their influence will be infallible. Very often our materialistic mentality tends to evaluate the success of any function by its attendance. Many times people ask me, 'Well, how many people come to your place?' I only say: 'I have never counted the attendance. I consider that our task is to build up an atmosphere.' The scriptures say that not too many people are drawn towards spirituality. Innumerable people come to this world who belong to the category of those who simply undergo the rounds of births and deaths. They are born, settle down to live with worldly pleasures and pains, and die. A purposeless, goalless life!

The Purpose of Life

If someone is asked, 'Well, what's the purpose of your life?' he would answer: 'What's this purpose you are talking

about?' As if, it is impossible to think that there can be a purpose of this life. Bankimchandra told the Master that the purpose of life was eating, sleeping, etc. The Master replied: 'Eh! You are very saucy! What you do day and night comes out through your mouth. A man belches what he eats.' Of course Bankimchandra was intelligent, and so he was not hurt by the Master's scolding. In fact, he submitted before the Master with humility: 'Sir, we also take the name of God.' That is good, but certainly not good enough. Come what may, a few shall have to live with this singular ideal. Not only in the temples and monasteries but even in households, if a handful of persons hold on to the ideal firmly, then an atmosphere will certainly be created. Of course, in every place there should be someone as its life force, whose character should attract others. Such small centres, spread everywhere, will help bring about a suitable atmosphere for spiritual living. Large meetings or seminars cannot create such an atmosphere, because meetings or assemblies only satisfy the inherent human curiosity, but never touch actual life. Life cannot be touched so easily because it lies much deeper. That is why the Master frequented such places. The Master used to visit the Brāhmo Samāj, the Hari-sabhā and even places of Tāntric worship. He even personally called on the well-known persons of the contemporary enlightened society. He went to Kalnā to meet Bhagawandas Babaji, called on Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidya-sagar, and others at Calcutta, and met Shashadhar Tarkachudamani and Dayananda Saraswati. He met all of them because he knew that if a little divine inspiration could be infused in them, it would do much good. He himself called on them because the onus was very much on him. For the purpose for which he came had to be fulfilled. He knew that the Divine Mother had ordained that the work should continue. Therefore he moved around as a precursor, facilitating the work as an instrument in the hands of the Mother.

The Purpose of the Master's Actions

The Master said: 'Worldly people will never listen to you if you ask them to renounce everything and devote themselves wholeheartedly to God.' The Master knew that very few people would be able to assimilate the teachings in their pure form. The scriptures know this, and so do the great teachers. And he, being an Avatāra himself, was well aware of it. So the Master did not talk exclusively about God with the devotees. Often he cut jokes and indulged in lighter conversation too. Those who came in contact with the Master realized in their hearts how deep his affection was, which made even their parent's affection insignificant. In so many ways he drew them to him. He asked one person, 'Give him a smoke.' To somebody else: 'Give him something to eat.' For someone else he even advised, 'Pay his carriage fare.' When he was terminally ill, Girish went to meet him. Even then he became anxious to entertain Girish with fried snacks (kachuri) brought from Fagu's shop. He was unable to move but he dragged himself to get water for Girish. Why was it necessary? It was necessary because he knew that he was training these devotees as instruments so that a large number of people would imbibe his ideas. Hence he exemplified such renunciation and endured so much suffering. It really fills our mind with wonder to see how methodically and how beautifully he carried out his plan of work. Perhaps, he himself was not aware of it all. We say he was unaware of it because it was almost natural with him, like breathing. Thus through each and every action, he ensured the welfare of people in such an easy and natural way.

CHAPTER 16

The Gospel (October 28, 1882)

Swamiji—The Master's Instrument

Sri Ramakrishna was discussing spiritual matters with the Brāhmo devotees assembled at the Sinthi Brāhmo Samāj. Many times the Master would say: 'To know God through knowledge and reasoning is extremely difficult.' Of course, we have come across exceptions to this. He taught Swamiji the path of jñāna. While he made Swamiji accept Śakti, side by side he also taught him: 'Brahman alone has become everything.' Swamiji did not, however, accept it immediately and used to make fun of it: 'Yes, God has become all! Then a pot is God, a cup is God!' The Master only smiled a little and said: 'Yes, you shall come to realize it later.' And later it really happened. Swamiji was astounded to find that there was really nothing in the universe but God. In his own words: '... but there too, everything I saw appeared to be Brahman. I sat down to take my meal, but found that everything—the food, the plate, the person who served, and even myself—was nothing but That.' Thereafter he could not disbelieve the words of the Master. We have seen that the Master never objected to anybody having different views. Therefore, he did not argue with Narendranath when the latter refused to recognize the Divine Mother. But when the same Narendranath accepted the Mother, how happy the Master was! This is because he was training Narendranath specially to be a true instrument, an āchārya from whom different types of people would receive know-

ledge. That was why the Master was so intent on teaching him different ideas. If a small quantity of water satisfies one's thirst, then what is the need of measuring the total amount of water in the ocean? But this is applicable only for ordinary people. The Master never placed Narendranath in that category. He made a wonderful instrument of Narendranath by perfecting him in various, though apparently contradictory, ideals. It was from this instrument that the message of the harmony of religions spread far and wide.

The Absence of Ego in Sri Ramakrishna

The Master next discussed 'the seven planes' mentioned in the Vedas which are descriptions of the different stages of the mind. Those stages are realized through personal experience and not by reasoning. When the mind enters the seventh plane the body cannot function anymore. We have observed in the life of the Master that when his mind entered the seventh plane and it could not be brought down, by an act of Providence someone would come to bring his mind down and feed him. He lived for six months in such a state. Of course, an ordinary person can never hope to live long in such a state. If our body is not presided over by consciousness it will not last. Now what about the āchāryas? The Master said: 'They retain a bit of the ego of knowledge'. Śankarācharya and other preceptors had a little of the ego of knowledge, which enabled them to preach. But speaking about himself, the Master said: 'There is no "I" in this [referring to his body]. "He" alone is here.' Indeed, this is most surprising. He never said: 'A little bit of ego is here'. He said: 'Nothing of "I", or "me" exists here. He alone abides in this body.' In other words, he never identified himself with the body. He considered his body as an instrument controlled by the Divine Mother. Whatever happened in and through his body, was controlled by Her. Such a state of the absence of identification with the body and the feeling of oneself as an instrument of

the Divine Mother is possible only in the cases of Incarnations of God.

Different States of the Mind

The different planes of the mind stated earlier refer to different states of mind. For example, there are: the restless (kshipta), the bewildered (mudha), the distracted (vikshipta), the concentrated (ekāgra), etc. In the first state the mind is almost insane; it perceives things in the opposite way—truth becomes untruth and vice versa. In the stage of mudha, intelligence does not function properly. The next state is vikshipta, when the mind oscillates between truth and untruth. Such a state is also called ‘sometimes Godwards, sometimes worldly’. The next state is ekāgra, when the mind is made to withdraw from worldly objects so as to concentrate on the subject of meditation. The state higher than this is called nirodha, when mental modifications totally cease. The next state is ‘svatah vyutthān’—the state when the mind enters into samādhi. Even in that state the mind retains traces of its latent impressions and it returns to the normal plane. Moving forward, the mind enters the state called ‘paratah vyutthān’—when the mind does not come down at all. It can be brought down only by external help. The Master personally experienced all these stages of the mind, and he had thus become a unique instrument of the Divine Mother.

The Master next said: ‘The path of knowledge and discrimination is difficult indeed.... It is easier to attain God by following the path of devotion.’ It is hard to say why the Master said this. Perhaps he said this because most people would not like the state when the individuality is completely erased. Even a Brahmajnānī, who pursues the path of knowledge and aspires to attain Brahman, may feel afraid thinking about his imminent annihilation. So he said: ‘It is easier to attain God by following the path of devotion.’ Why does he say it is easier? Because it is possible for many people

to follow this path. On the other hand, it is not at all easy for an ordinary person to completely efface his own self, like the jñānī.

Mathur in an Ecstatic Mood

As long as the mind is tainted by the slightest trace of desire, it is impossible to remain in any higher state of consciousness, not to speak of samādhi, which is a far cry. It is like what happened to Mathur. Once Mathur prayed to the Master to do something so that he might have ecstasy. The Master said to him: 'Oh! it will surely come at the right time.' Later when Mathur actually experienced ecstasy he sent for the Master. He clasped both the Master's feet and said: 'Excuse me, father, I admit defeat.... I cannot at all apply my mind to the affairs of my estate in spite of all my efforts ...Please take back the ecstasy conferred by you. I don't want it.' If just a temporary experience of an ecstatic mood makes one feel so, then it would be unbearable if one's mind is completely dissolved. That is why it has been said: 'Even the yogīs feel afraid visualizing the divine form of fearlessness.'

Effacement of 'I'

While advising Maitreyi, Yājñavalkya said: 'After attaining (this oneness), it has no more consciousness.' Here consciousness refers to knowledge, and knowledge means worldly knowledge such as 'I' and 'mine'. Hearing that all this would be lost Maitreyi said rather anxiously: 'What shall I do with such a state? I don't feel happy with it at all.' Then Yājñavalkya said: '...Consciousness does not mean that your Self will be destroyed. The consciousness meant here is worldly consciousness, and that will be destroyed.'

Perhaps Maitreyi's fear was allayed by this explanation, but ordinary people can never shed their fear. If it goes into one's head that the 'I' will be completely effaced, then no

matter how desirable the position may be, a person would never go for it, saying: 'I don't require such a state. I am happy with my present position.' This is the mentality of ordinary persons. That is why the Master said: 'It is easier to attain God by following the path of devotion.'

The Master continued, saying that once a person requested him: 'Sir, can you teach me quickly the thing you call samādhi?' Everybody present there laughed. People are interested in hearing about the state called samādhi. If that state can be enjoyed, why not go for it? Let's recount the story of 'the five-rupee-trance.' A person used to sell something called 'trance' for five rupees. He would make people sit down and think in a specific way. Then he would use hypnosis on them and take them to such a state in which they would feel that they are in the state of trance. And this trance was easily attainable, for only five rupees. Perhaps that prompted the enquirer to ask: 'Can you teach me quickly the thing you call samādhi?'

The Ecstatic State

When an aspirant is fully immersed in Him, he can no longer sport with God as we do. We sing His glories, enjoy His various sports and so on. So the Master said: '... but as the mind dives deeper into God, it becomes less active. Last of all comes renunciation of work followed by samādhi... The man who has been singing all the while then becomes speechless.' Even a devotee can attain samādhi in this way, but he cannot thenceforth be engaged in external activities. The Master stated that after attaining samādhi he had once wanted to perform 'tarpan' but failed. Later Haladhari explained that it was a stage of sādhanā when 'after the vision of God, such duties as the performance of tarpan drop away.'

Sri Ramakrishna next talked about Avatāras and siddha-purushas (perfect souls). By an Avatāra he means a unique manifestation of divine power. The Avatāra, the siddha, and

the siddha of the siddhas—they are so classified depending upon the degree of manifestation of their divine power. God's power exists fully in all beings, but the manifestations of His power are different. We understand this with reference to this mundane world. That is why the Master told Vidyasagar in reply to his question: 'And why do all people respect you?... You have more compassion and learning. Therefore people honour you and come to pay you their respects.' An immutable object cannot be broken into fragments—big or small. He exists fully even in the minutest dust particle. The difference lies in the degree of manifestation. And from this we can know who is a bound soul, a seeker of liberation, a perfect soul, or an Avatāra.

The Splendour and Sweetness of God

Next came the issue of giving lectures. The Master said: 'One day when Keshab and his party came to the temple at Dakshineshwar, I told them I wanted to hear how they lectured.' Keshab was an extraordinary orator, so he spoke very well. The Master was so overwhelmed with joy hearing the lecture that he went into samādhi. But later he said: 'Why do you so often say such things as: "O God, what beautiful flowers Thou hast made! O God, Thou hast created the heavens, the stars, and the ocean!" and so on? Those who love splendour themselves are fond of dwelling on God's splendour.' As one goes closer to God one sees less and less of His splendours. Rather he becomes more deeply drawn to God Himself. The Lord, who initially appeared as an infinite reservoir of power, will finally be seen as a limitless ocean of love. The attraction for God's glories and splendour that is seen in the stages of a devotee's attitude of peace (śānta), and his attitude of a servant towards the Lord (dāśya), wanes away in the stage of his attitude of friendship towards Him (sakhya). Progressively waning in this manner, it finally dies in the devotee's attitude of a mother towards her child (vātsalya).

When we shall be able to develop this relationship with God—that of a mother who expects nothing from her child, who only gives and does not receive—we shall have advanced very close to Him. Finally comes the attitude of a woman towards her paramour (madhura), when one becomes totally one with the Beloved in love, when there is no longer any sense of dualism.

A devotee asked about rebirth: 'Sir, do you believe in the reincarnation of the soul?' The Master said: 'Yes, they say there is something like that. How can we understand the ways of God through our small intellects? Many people have spoken about reincarnation; therefore I cannot disbelieve it.' As Bhīshma said: 'I am thinking that there is no end to the Pāṇdavas' sufferings, though God Himself is their charioteer. A thought like this makes me feel that I have understood nothing of the ways of God, and so I weep.' The idea is that though you are already observing His sport so much, but are unable to understand it, then why bother yourself with the thought of rebirth? Instead, it would be better to think of how to fully utilize the present life that has been given to you. It is not possible to understand this infinite universe. And what need is there in stuffing one's brain with a number of useless ideas? Having attained this rare human birth, we have heard about God, and maybe we have a little bit of love for Him too. Therefore, our only concern is to try to concentrate on Him, strive to dive deep in Him and sport with Him.

CHAPTER 17

The Gospel (December 14, 1882)

Sri Vijaykrishna Goswami had come to see Sri Ramakrishna at the Kālī temple in Dakshineswar. Vijaykrishna was a paid preacher in the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj, so he had to follow the principles of the Samāj. He had very little scope for free thinking. However, the innate love of God which he had inherited from his great ancestor, Advaita Goswāmi of the Vaishnava tradition, was becoming more manifest now. Coming into contact with Sri Ramakrishna, the veil that had covered his innate devotion and love of God was being slowly removed. He would listen to the Master's words with great eagerness and would sometimes dance with Sri Ramakrishna like a boy, inebriated with divine love.

Scriptures and Reincarnation

The conversation turned to a boy-devotee who had recently committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. Hearing this the Master said: 'Perhaps this was his last birth.' This statement needs to be specially examined. Normally the Master would not express his views about reincarnation. He might reply if asked: 'I have heard like that' or 'The scriptures say so.' Here he said: 'One must admit the existence of tendencies inherited from previous births.' Otherwise, one cannot explain how some people show very good tendencies from their very childhood. The child could not have acquired those tendencies in his present birth. So it can be surmised that

those were inherited from a previous birth. The Master narrated a story to clarify this: 'There is a story about a man who practised the "śava-sādhana".* ... First he saw many terrible visions. Finally a tiger attacked and killed him. Another man, happening to pass by and seeing the approach of the tiger had climbed a tree. Afterwards he got down and found all the arrangements of worship at hand. He performed some purifying ceremonies and seated himself on the corpse. No sooner had he done a little japa than the Divine Mother appeared before him and said: "My child, I am very much pleased with you. Accept a boon from me." He bowed low at the Lotus Feet of the Goddess and said: "...I am speechless with amazement at Your action. The other man worked so hard to get the ingredients for Your worship and tried to propitiate You for such a long time, but he did not succeed. And I, who don't know anything of worship, who have done nothing, who have neither devotion nor knowledge... am receiving Your grace." The Divine Mother said with a laugh: "My child, you don't remember your previous births. For many births you tried to propitiate Me... and [now] you have been blessed with My vision.'" Here the idea is that a person is born along with tendencies from his previous births. A single birth is not all there is. If everything ended in a single birth, then it would be chaos—'the effects of deeds committed would be destroyed, while those of deeds not committed would bear fruit' (*kritāhāni akritābhyāgama*). Someone may have performed numerous pious deeds, but they would not bear fruit in this life. Again, there may be some other person enjoying either good or bad results from his childhood without having earned anything in this life. The scriptures say that the fruits of actions are never destroyed; they will be experienced in the next birth. We come across the same explanation in the *Gītā* also. Arjuna enquires: 'O Krishna, failing to achieve perfection

*A religious practice prescribed by the Tantra, in which the aspirant uses a śava, or corpse, as his seat for meditation.

in Yoga, what goal does one attain who, though possessed of faith, is not diligent and whose mind becomes deflected from Yoga?'¹ The scriptures assert that nothing of the effects of what one has performed is lost. Sri Krishna replies: 'No one engaged in good meets with a deplorable end.'² Arjuna puts the eternal question: 'What shall become of him whose mind becomes deflected from Yoga? Fallen from that, does he not get ruined like a scattered cloud?' Those who have seen clouds in the mountains, know what being ruined like scattered clouds means. A cloud dashes against the top of a mountain, and when it rises again a piece of it may have clung to the mountain. After a while we see that piece of cloud dissolve. That is, it neither rejoins the cloud, nor does it remain on the mountain. Will the life of a fallen yogī be like that? Will his present life and the lives to follow be wasted?

The scriptures say that nothing will be wasted. Whatever he has done in this life will bear fruit in his new life. This is why different persons are born with different latent tendencies. Some are born with love for God from their childhood, while others are born with impure minds. A person has not acquired this purity or impurity in his present life. So it has to be understood that the inherited tendencies of previous births are responsible for this. Therefore, 'It is imperative that we enjoy or suffer the effects of our deeds, good or bad.' If we do not reflect on the necessity of experiencing the fruits of our past deeds in our present life, we may think that we will not face these in the next life. Many criminals continue their depredations all their life but live in a grand way till the last day. Observing this we may wonder how it is that there is no result of the cruel deeds they have done. The scriptures say that death brings about a change of body, but the accumulated tendencies remain intact. Consequently, one day or another the fruits of one's past actions are bound to be experienced. Therefore, the results of one's spiritual practices continue through subsequent lives, though one will not have any memory of them. Thus the Lord tells Arjuna in the *Gītā*: 'O

Arjuna, many lives of Mine have passed, and so have yours. I know them all, (but) you know not, O scorcher of enemies!³ We do not have any other way to verify this except to have faith in the above scriptural text. Though we understand that the effects of deeds committed cannot be destroyed, while those of deeds not committed can never bear fruit, our faith in this regard is never firm.

Sri Ramakrishna and the Sayings in the Bible

The Master's attitude on this issue is, why worry about the past and future births which are beyond your knowledge? Make the best use of the life that you have at your disposal. If there is such a thing as reincarnation of the soul it will be useful, and if there is none, nothing shall be wasted. There is a story in the Bible. A man suffering in hell after death appealed: 'I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied: 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' But he insisted: 'No father, if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent'. Abraham said to him: 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'

Now let us assume that there is such a thing as reincarnation. The scriptures say that suicide is a heinous sin. A man who kills himself must return again and again to this world and suffer. But the Master said: 'But I don't call it suicide if a person leaves his body after having the vision of God. There is no harm in giving up one's body that way. After attaining knowledge some people give up their bodies.'

Suicide: Some Illustrations

The Upanishads say that those who commit suicide go to a dark world of suffering, which is called hell (naraka) in the

Purānas. When does a person commit suicide? When a person can no longer endure the intensity of physical or mental torments, he or she thinks the body to be the principal cause of all suffering and destroys it. But if suffering does not end even after destroying the gross body, then there is no justification in destroying it. That is why the Master said that one must '...return again and again to this world.' So it is better to endure torments and sufferings bravely. But the Master said, 'For the one who has accomplished the purpose of life with the body, suicide is not a sin.' The Master explained the issue by an example: 'After the well is dug, one generally throws away the spade and the basket.' In the same way the goal is to attain God through this body. Now he who has attained God through this body-mind complex has no use of the body. The great souls who retain their bodies after samādhi feel compassion for the suffering of others. They are not so selfish to be satisfied with their own illumination.' It is like retaining the spade and the basket even after the well is dug. But one who commits suicide before the attainment of God is indeed unfortunate, because the opportunity to seek and attain God through the body is still there. At least such a possibility exists, and it is because this possibility is there that it is wrong to destroy the body. It is a great sin to do so. To emphasize this the Master advised people not to neglect the body. This body is the temple of God; the purpose of life is to install God within it. It is therefore necessary to keep it healthy, beautiful, and strong. Not to do that only betrays one's weakness and takes one deeper into sorrow and suffering. As the Master put it, one must '...return again and again to this world and suffer its agony.'

It is customary with us to salute a person if by accident our foot touches his body. Now, whom do we salute? We salute God, who abides in this temple called our body. Even seniors should view their juniors from this angle, since every body is the temple of God. Where's the scope to discriminate between seniors and juniors? The only difference is that in some cases the deity within this temple is manifest while in

others it is not. But all have the potentiality of manifesting the Divinity. Therefore, one should not consider the body, through which God-realization is possible, insignificant, nor should one neglect it. From this point of view the scriptures say that it is a great sin to commit suicide. The parameter that differentiates between virtue and sin is this: that which helps us advance towards God is virtue, and that which takes us away from Him is sin.

In Praise of Virtuous Deeds

Sometimes people perform virtuous deeds in order to attain heaven. In a sense such acts also help purify the mind slowly and help people advance towards God. Of course, the scriptures say that our desire for heaven, and making it our goal, also binds us. Just as a person living amidst wealth and splendour tends to forget God, so also if someone's mind is intent on enjoying heavenly splendour, it does not take him towards God. But the pious deeds, spiritual practices, and so on, performed with a view to attaining heaven, slowly purify the mind. The purity of mind thus achieved takes the aspirant a little closer to God. That is why pious deeds are praised so much in the scriptures. The human mind, with its cravings, naturally goes after sensual enjoyments. Lest such craving is directed exclusively towards creature comforts thereby degenerating the person, the scriptures say that your desire for sense enjoyment will also be served if you follow the scriptural injunctions. When a person follows a path prescribed by the scriptures, he necessarily imposes certain restraints on himself and it becomes impossible to lead an out and out sub-human life. Thus when a sensual person unconsciously curbs his animal propensities by following the scriptural injunctions, it becomes his first step towards the purification of his mind. Later, when the mind gradually becomes purer, the scriptures advise: 'Don't concentrate your mind on sense enjoyment. Perform sacrifices and other things

as disinterestedly as possible.' Or, they may say: 'Make devotion the essence of your life.' Or 'Know your Self.' But these may prove ineffective if mentioned at the beginning.

The Evolution of the Human Mind

The Master therefore said that when people would come to him with their minds full of intense desire for sense enjoyment, he would say, 'Eat, drink, and enjoy.' But he would also tell them, 'But know that these are nothing.' That is, this will not help them achieve the ultimate goal of life. But if they were asked to abandon sense enjoyment at the very beginning, they would not care to listen. Now, if the Master himself permits us to 'eat, drink, and enjoy', then what is wrong if we enjoy? There is nothing wrong as such. The scriptures do not proscribe it either. They too say: 'Enjoy, but remember, abstinence is highly rewarding.' People say that enjoyment is human nature. There is no harm in pursuing one's own nature. Besides what else can one do? The mind wants enjoyment. If we say: 'Don't enjoy. It is not proper,' it will not listen. Therefore, it should be let loose for a while so that it can enjoy. At the same time one is reminded: 'But know that these are nothing.' Be discerning while you enjoy. When a fish swallows the bait and pulls the line, one must instantly release some more line. Then one should manoeuvre the line a little to reel in the fish. If one pulls the line in the beginning, it may break. That is why the Master would advise those who desired sense enjoyment to finish it, giving at the same time this advice: 'But know that these are nothing.' It is possible that they may forget the advice. But a time comes when it strikes them that the Master had said something by way of advice. Maybe at that moment they will recall what the Master had said: 'But know that these are nothing.'

Our scriptures also advise different aspirants according to their individual tendencies. The aspirant desiring a son

gets the injunction of performing the Putreshti sacrifice, the aspirant desiring crops is asked to perform the Kārīri sacrifice. Even one who intends to eliminate his enemies can perform the Śyena sacrifice. We may wonder why the scriptures encourage us to perform such unethical work. The scriptures do not encourage us; we encourage ourselves. The scriptures only try to draw the human mind, keen on sense enjoyment, towards following the scriptural injunctions. If the scriptures had proclaimed only exalted ideals, then they would have only a few followers. The majority would have to carry on without following any scriptural injunctions. The scriptures have understood our shortcomings, and therefore have offered advice suited to individual requirements.

Advice of Jesus Christ

Once a man approached Jesus and asked: 'Good Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?' Jesus replied: 'Why do you call me good? There is only One who is good. If you enter life, obey the commandments.' Then Jesus listed the commandments: do this, do that, and so on. Then the young man said: 'All these I have kept. What do I still lack?' Then Jesus answered: 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me!'⁴ He did not ask everyone to follow him at the very outset, because then all would not come. Only one or two might have responded, while the majority would have followed their own paths. In order to impress on them his teachings it was necessary that he had to heal the sick, raise the dead, and walk over water. While reading the Bible one gets the impression that it is filled with miracles. Did Jesus have no other business than to act like a magician? The reason behind it was that, it was necessary to assess how and to what extent the people for whom he had come were able to understand him, accept him, and follow him.

Variety in Advice

The Master felt that people should be taught differently according to their individual dispositions. Indeed, the scriptures have also done that. But when we try to study the scriptures with our limited intelligence we are often confused. We find that while they contain great spiritual truths, they also discuss many depraved practices and rituals. It is because society itself is like that. The scriptures are a reflection of a variety of people. Because of such variety the teachings are also varied. At whatever level a person is, he or she has to be taken forward step by step. For the same reason we find in the Vedas and other scriptures that while injunctions on the supreme goal of life have been codified, at the same time very ordinary injunctions acceptable to common people have also been incorporated. In fact, such ordinary injunctions are more. We shall have to understand the scriptures keeping this important aspect in view.

Committing suicide is a very heinous act for most people. For they are yet to attain the supreme goal of life, which is the attainment of God, with the help of the body. However, after the attainment of God there is no need of retaining the body; it really doesn't matter then whether it exists or not. In this context, it may be thought that preserving the body may be useful for the good of others. But not everybody has the desire to do good to others, nor is there any need for it. This is because at that stage the saint finds God in everybody, so who will teach and to whom? In that plane, no teaching is possible. The Master, however, says that in some people God retains the 'ego of knowledge'.

Once the Master enquired of M.: 'Have I any ego?'

M.: 'Yes, sir. A little. You have kept it to preserve your body, and to enjoy divine love in the company of devotees and to impart spiritual knowledge to them.'

Master: 'No. I have not kept it. It is God Himself who has left it in me.'

This is something we should think about. The Lord may either retain the ego, or if He so likes, dispense with His instrument. When my purpose is fulfilled, then whether the body should remain to serve God's purpose or perish is up to Him to decide. Thus, one who has attained God no longer feels the urge to bother whether the body stays or goes. The divine will of the One who controls everything determines what will happen. One who has attained the goal of life does not bother at all about anything.

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3. *Bahuni me vyatitāni janmāni tava chārjuna,
Tānyaham veda sarvāni na tvam vettha parantapa.*
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CHAPTER 18

The Gospel (December 14, 1882)

Sri Ramakrishna was discussing spiritual matters with Vijaykrishna Goswami and other Brāhmo devotees at the Kālī temple in Dakshineswar. The Master referred to four classes of human beings—the bound, those aspiring after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-perfect.

Bound Souls

We find bound souls all around. The Master gives an example: Bound souls are like fish trapped in a fishing-net. No sooner are they entangled than they run headlong, net and all, trying to hide themselves in the mud. They think they are quite safe there. They don't know that the fisherman will pull them out and they will face certain death. They are not at all conscious of it. These are the signs of bound souls. The *Mahābhārata* describes that wonderful phenomenon in a verse which says: 'Day after day countless creatures are going to the abode of Yama, yet those who remain behind believe themselves to be immortal. What can be more wonderful than this?'¹ Day after day human beings die, but that does not appear to bother others at all. They think that no matter who may die, they will remain as before. There is not the least awareness of bondage to a bound soul. He doesn't appear to be conscious at all that he is bound hand and foot. That is why a person makes elaborate plans: 'I will do this, I will do that.' Perhaps it never occurs to him that if there is a call today he

has to go. Once Hriday tied up a bull-calf at Dakshineshwar and it was feeding on grass. When the Master enquired about it, Hriday said that when the calf grew up he would send it to his native place to be yoked to a plough. Hearing this the Master fainted. Such a little calf would grow, be sent to such a distant village, and then be engaged in cultivation. What planning!

But we make far bigger plans than this. We think we shall execute them by remaining alive forever and enjoying the fruits thereof. Here we are not speaking about national planning. We are only talking about individual planning. The question is, should we not make plans? The Master does not say that. We shall certainly have to make plans, but at the same time we should always keep in mind that we can do only that which is reasonably possible for us and we must leave the rest for others. And we should be always ready to leave this world. There is nothing wrong if we plan in this manner. But such understanding is not possible unless we become selfless. If my mind is filled with selfish ideas, I will never make plans for something whose fruits I cannot enjoy. A bound soul never thinks that his coming to this world is only for some time, that he will have to go, leaving behind everything as and when the call comes. Rather, his behaviour creates the impression that he has come to this world with plans to be a permanent resident here, and that he shall never be asked to leave.

Seekers of Liberation and Liberated Souls

The seeker after liberation is conscious of his bondage. He can't stand the feeling of bondage and is pained by its torments, so he makes every effort to be liberated. But all those who strive for liberation are not necessarily freed. The Master gives the example: 'When the fish are entangled in the net, some of them try to tear through its meshes in order to get their liberation. They are like men striving for liberation. But by no means all of them escape. Only a few jump out of the net

with a loud splash.' In the same way, only those who can tear through Mahāmāyā's net, become liberated souls.

The Ever-perfect

There is another class of human beings whom the Master calls the ever-perfect (Nityasiddha). Clever fish are never caught in the net; similarly the ever-perfect are never entangled in the meshes of worldliness. They arrive like others in this world. But when a little knowledge is awakened in them, they realize that they do not belong to this world. The Master said that many of his disciples belong to this class of the ever-perfect. They did not arrive in this world under the impulse of any desire; they came with the Incarnation as his associates, for the welfare of the world. The Master cited the example of Nārada. Nārada's mind was filled with a strong desire for renunciation even when he was five years old. His only bondage was his poor old mother, who maintained herself and her son by serving as a maidservant in a brahmin's house. When his mother died of snakebite he was just five years old. Apparently this was a great misfortune, but Nārada felt that he was relieved of the only bondage that tied him down. So he left to do sādhanā. After walking a long distance, he finally settled down under a tree for meditation. Needless to say, he began his meditation with a mind that had never been entangled in worldliness. As his meditation deepened, he was blessed with God's vision. However, God disappeared after a while. When he could no longer see the Lord in meditation, the boy started weeping piteously and appealed: 'O Lord, why did you disappear after giving me Your blessed vision?' Then he heard a divine voice saying: 'O Nārada, the vision you had is sufficient for your present life. You will not get My vision anymore, but this one vision shall fill your entire life with bliss. Now roam throughout the universe singing My glories.' Needless to say, Nārada assumed a human form just to teach us how to cultivate devotion to God. He did not have

any other purpose to appear in this world except to help others. These then are the characteristics of the ever-perfect.

The world is full of bound souls. They are seen everywhere. The seekers of liberation are relatively few, maybe one can find a few here and there. The liberated souls are very difficult to find, while the ever-perfect are not only extremely scarce, but even if found, they can hardly be recognized.

Characteristics of Bound Souls

While speaking about bound souls the Master gave a terrible illustration: 'The camel loves to eat thorny bushes. The more it eats the thorns, the more the blood gushes out from its mouth. Still it must eat thorny plants and will never give them up.' Worldly persons suffer so much sorrow and affliction. If we could only see within those people who appear to be happy, we would find them to be filled with sadness. In the *Gītā*, the Lord says: 'Having come to this ephemeral and joyless world, worship Me.'² In this ephemeral, transitory world there is no end to sorrows, so, withdrawing our minds from impermanent objects, we must worship Him. As a camel does not stop eating thorny bushes even though its mouth is bleeding, likewise human beings suffer so much in this world, yet they still want to belong to this world. When we are actually suffering we dislike this world and think of withdrawing from it. But we cannot leave as we are bound hand and foot. The Master was surprised to find a relative of Keshab Sen, who was about fifty years old, playing cards. But we are not surprised, because we see such scenes almost everywhere. The bound soul is like the fisherman's wife who could not sleep without the smell of her fish-basket. She felt uneasy with the scent of flowers.

Liberation for Bound Souls

Now the question arises: 'What must the bound soul's condition of mind be in order to achieve liberation?' The

Master replied: 'He [the bound soul] can free himself from attachment to "woman and gold" if, by the grace of God, he cultivates a strong spirit of renunciation. What is this strong renunciation? One who has only a mild spirit of renunciation says, "Well, all will happen in course of time; let me now simply repeat the name of God." But a man possessed of a strong spirit of renunciation feels restless for God, as the mother feels for her own child.' Owing to such mild renunciation the fruition of many aspirants' sādhanā becomes a distant prospect. Many aspirants are at first enthusiastic. They hope to attain the goal within no time. But when they find that in spite of strenuously fighting with the mind day in and day out they are defeated, they understand that attaining God is not as easy as they had thought. And this feeling breeds dejection, which is the greatest enemy of an aspirant. It is good to feel hurt for not having attained God, but it becomes a matter of concern when this feeling breeds despair, which in turn undermines the determination of an aspirant and his sādhanā fizzles out. The scriptures say that this is due to inadvertence and laziness. Inadvertence is due to the aspirant's not being conscious of the goal. But even if the aspirant has the awareness, he is overpowered by such lethargy that he is unable to move any further. It is not for nothing that the scriptures say: 'The wise ones describe that path to be as impassable as a sharp razor's edge and difficult to tread on.'³ The path to the attainment of God is as difficult as walking on a razor's edge. It is almost an impossible task for ordinary people. However, it is this impossible task that has to be accomplished, because no other way is left to reach God. It is human nature to always seek the easiest path, and having found a path which one thinks is the easiest, one follows that. But as he travels along he finds that it is not at all easy. Such statements often mislead people: 'Do this much and that will do.' 'Call Him once, and that is enough.' But what to speak of once, when even after calling at the top of one's voice even hundreds or thousands of times there is no response, then

doubts crop up. But along with doubts the aspirant feels some attraction as well. Then the aspirant's mind swings between doubts and attraction. So there is no point in giving false promises that there are simple ways to God, because there is no such path at all.

Let us take the example of Girish Ghosh here. The Master told Girish Ghosh: 'Very well, if you cannot do anything else, remember Him once before taking food and once before going to bed.' Finding that Girish was unable to remember God even once a day, let alone twice a day, the Master, in a state of divine semi-consciousness, said: 'You seem to say, "I cannot do even that." Very well, then give me the power of attorney.' Girish Ghosh felt greatly relieved after securing such an easy way to the attainment of God. But one day when Girish said in the presence of the Master with regard to a trifling matter, 'I will do it,' the Master instantly remonstrated, saying, 'Look here! Why do you say I will do it? Suppose you cannot do it. What then? You should say, 'I shall do it if God so will.' Girish on his part felt: 'That is quite right. I completely placed on God all my responsibilities, and he has accepted it. I can do a thing only if He thinks it proper and good for me and allows me to do so.' In his later life he came to realize that he had to watch at every step and every breath whether in all his thoughts and deeds he was depending on God and His power, or on this wretched 'I'. He confided his feeling: 'I now find that at sometime there is an end to spiritual practices like japa, austerities and so on... but there is no end to the work of a person who has given the "power of attorney".'

Glories of God's Name

The scriptures state that no matter how God's name is taken, either reverentially or out of disrespect, it will certainly benefit the person. Hearing this, people think: Why not take God's name once or twice a day? It does not take much time. But the next piece of scriptural advice is: 'Well, you are taking

God's name, but do you know how to do so? The mind is to be made one with the name. Do you have the required concentration?' What a calamity! Concentration? That's a very hard task. It is easier to repeat His name ten thousand times but concentration, be it for even five minutes, is extremely difficult. Once Swamiji was singing in the presence of the Master: 'Think of God without any interruption, always...' Hearing this the Master said jokingly: 'Why do you say a thing which you will not do? Say, twice a day!' The idea is that it is not possible to strike a deal with God—that we shall take His name for a specified number of times and in exchange He will take care of all our needs (yoga-kshema). He has said in the *Gītā*: 'I look after the welfare of the devotee; that is, I give one that which he needs, and also protect all that he has.' Then it is certainly beneficial to be His devotee! He shall arrange for everything we need and protect all that we already possess. But He has at the same time said one more thing, which we tend to forget. The Lord looks after the welfare of those, He says, who 'constantly think of Me alone with no other thought' and who are 'one with Me always in divine worship'. Allured by the prospect of this protection (yoga-kshema) we may run after Him, but hearing His conditions we cry out: 'Good heavens, Lord, we do not want either your yoga or your kshema.'

In fact, we always seek the path of least resistance. But no such way is there for the attainment of God. Rather all the ways are extremely perilous, where we are put to the test at each and every step. Even the Gopis, who offered everything to God, were put to such tests. They had to emerge successful and then only could they secure His grace!

Renunciation and Longing

The Gopis renounced everything—their husbands, their children, their own relations, and came to Sri Krishna mad with divine yearning. Sri Krishna asked them: 'Good. So you

have come. What can I do for you?' It was, as if they were all strangers to Him. One for whom they had renounced everything was behaving like that! This is how one is tested. But if the perils that await us on the path to God are painted beforehand, then nobody would ever tread that path. It is therefore necessary to say that there are ways out of these difficulties. Depend on Him. He will protect us from all dangers. 'I deliver them from the sea of the world which is fraught with death. ...Those who have their minds absorbed in Me.' But to be delivered, one should have the desire to be delivered. As the Master said: 'The worm that grows in filth feels very happy there. It thrives in filth. It will die if you put it in a pot of rice.' Our position is, perhaps, identical. We feel comfortable in the dirt and filth of the world. In fact, we thrive in it. Where is the scope for contemplation on God? Even if we think about God, it is like what Swami Vivekananda described, decorating the drawing room with a Japanese flower vase, because that is the fashion. Religion for us is as 'necessary' as a flower vase. This is how we think of God. But this will not work; we have to give our entire mind. It is, indeed, very difficult to totally concentrate on Him, shedding thousands of fetters that bind us.

Self-surrender

Even though the scriptural injunctions are very difficult to follow, we should try to abide by them. Why? Because no other benign path exists for the welfare of humanity. Indeed, what else we can do but surrender at His lotus feet, if this understanding really goes to our heart? The *Bhāgavata* says: A man finds that death, in the form of a vicious snake, is chasing him in order to bite him. So he runs. Running desperately, he covers all the three worlds—heaven, earth, and the nether world, but nowhere does he find any protection. The vicious snake ferociously runs after him. After running so long he is tired and helpless; but at last he finds himself before God's

lotus feet. It is not that he searched for them. By running frantically, or through the merits of previous birth, or else by His grace, he reaches His lotus feet. As he reaches there, he feels entirely secure and lies down in relief. Why? He has no longer any fear of death in the form of the vicious snake. That is, perhaps, why Nārāyaṇa's vehicle is, Garuda, whom snakes dare not approach. So, if one surrenders before His lotus feet one is saved from the clutches of death. What does 'death' refer to here? To remain forgetful of oneself is death; to forget one's real nature is death. This death abounds everywhere. We are always in the jaws of death; because death does not mean extinction of the body, but to remain forgetful of Him. To be relieved of death means to take refuge in Him. But to seek refuge in Him is also not easy, as we shall realize later. Only after running for protection through all the three worlds and completely exhausting ourselves like that person, shall we secure refuge at His lotus feet. But only when we feel exhausted after running for protection through all the three worlds and this fight with our mind makes us thoroughly drained, we may feel like surrendering. And then and then only does He give us refuge. Otherwise, how is it that we remain separate from Him even after being one with Him in so many ways? And our sādhanā to reach Him starts only after this world appears to us as poison.

The World and Sādhanā

It is a preposterous idea to live in the world and at the same time to consider it as poison. But so long as this world appears sweet, what is the need for any other sweetness? So the need for God does not arise then. Even if the need arises, perhaps we would prefer to ask: 'O God, my son is ailing. Let him come round.' Or, 'Let us have plenty of crops this year.' Our need is limited to that. We want this world and we want God as a means to help us enjoy its happiness and avoid its sorrows. Truly speaking, we do not sincerely feel the need for

Him. The heroic heart who really aspires for Him, who is prepared to renounce everything for Him, is indeed rare. We may think that this will mean taking *sannyāsa*. No; this is simply how every true devotee feels. We merely repeat words like a parrot when we say: 'O Lord! You are my all-in-all.' We are not firm enough to assimilate the true meaning of such statements. The Master said: 'Live in the world but, in order to realize God, hold fast to His Lotus Feet with one hand and with the other do your duties.' Immediately after that he said: 'When you get a respite from duties, cling to God's Lotus Feet with both hands.'

Holding on to Him with both hands in this manner is the goal. But to help us reach that stage, we are asked to hold on to Him with one hand, at least initially in such cases where circumstances so warrant. Otherwise, it is not possible at all to hold on to Him with one hand while doing our duties with the other. The main point is we should hold on to Him with both hands. But it is often found that either the world does not release one, or the person himself is not in a position to let go of the world. So a compromise is struck. We are advised to do our duties with one hand while holding on to Him with the other. The Master's direct disciples used to say: 'It is enough if we give only a fraction of our mind to worldly duties, giving the rest to God.' We often say, 'We are so overwhelmed with worldly duties that we do not have any time to think about God.' Even if this idea is kept alive in our mind then it amounts to thinking of God indirectly. But that does not happen. This is mere self-deception. We only deceive ourselves saying that the pressure of work does not allow us to think of God. Do we then keep in our mind that nothing exists other than Him? Does it occur to us: 'Everything is covered by *Īśvara*'⁴? This entire universe must be covered with the Self, and our entire life must be filled with the Divine. Do we have such ideas in mind when we say we do not have any time?

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2. *Anityamasukham lokam imam prāpya bhajasva mām.*
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3. *Kśurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā
durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti.*
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4. *Īśā vāsyamidam sarvam ...*
— *Īśā Upanishad*, 1

CHAPTER 19

The Gospel (December 14, 1882)

Sri Ramakrishna continued his discussion about God with Sri Vijaykrishna Goswami. Sri Goswami asked the Master: 'What does a man see when he attains the Knowledge of Brahman after reaching the seventh plane?' The Master replied: 'Reaching the seventh plane, the mind is annihilated; man goes into samādhi. What he feels then cannot be described in words.' It is like a salt doll which 'went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner did it enter the water than it melted.' In the same way after one attains the knowledge of Brahman the 'I' in him ceases to exist. It has been said in the *Katha Upanishad*: 'O Gautama, when pure water is poured into pure water, they both become one. The same thing happens to the Self of the sage who has attained Self-knowledge, that is, he becomes one with Brahman.'¹

The State of a Jnānī

Now the question arises whether in such a state the individual self ceases to exist. No; it does not. Only the fence that surrounds the individual self, giving it a distinct identity, dissolves. Or, the drop of water ceases to be a drop any longer; it becomes the ocean. Only its smallness as a finite drop vanishes and it merges into the infinite. The Master further clarified the matter: 'Water appears to be divided into two parts if one puts a stick across it. But in reality it is undivided. It appears two on account of the stick. This "I" is the stick.

Remove the stick and there remains only water as before.' In the same way, this 'I-sense' in me confers on me my individual identity, as it were. Now if that 'I' which is like the stick is removed, there is 'water, water, everywhere.' Remove the 'I' and the divisions like 'I am one', 'He is another' will fade away. Just as the appearance of division due to the stick in water is unreal, so also the 'I' is not separate from the true Self. It does not divide the non-dual, the immutable Supreme Self and the individual self. But like the division appearing in water, the individual self and the Supreme Self seem to be two separate entities. But they are not two entities in reality. The presence of the 'I' creates the illusion that it is divided. Therefore he says: 'This "I" is the stick. Remove the stick and there remains only water as before.'

Now the question is, if this 'I' is the root cause of all evil, then that path which annihilates the 'I' should be welcome. If the 'I' persists in the path of devotion, then the path of knowledge is better, since it removes ignorance and annihilates the ego. So Vijaykrishna put this question to the Master. The Master replied: 'It is true that one or two can get rid of the "I" through samādhi; but these cases are very rare. You may indulge in thousands of reasonings, but still the "I" comes back. You may cut the peepal tree to the very root today, but you will notice a sprout springing up tomorrow.'

We reason in this way: 'This world is unreal; I too am included in this world, so the sense of ego which is of the form "I and mine" is but a part of the unreal. In truth it has no existence, so the feeling that it is true arises due to delusion.' In this way we make our minds understand. But though we reason a thousand times, the 'I' never leaves us. The ego of great pundits and philosophers is also reflected in their scholarship and philosophical treatises. Try as one may to get rid of it, this ego never goes. The Master says that by an act of Providence the ego may be destroyed in one or two cases, but it is extremely difficult for ordinary people to annihilate the 'I' in this way. So he says: 'Therefore if the "I" must remain, let the

rascal remain as the "servant I". ... The "I" that feels, "I am the servant of God, I am His devotee" does not injure one.'

The Servant 'I' of a Devotee

The 'devotee I', or the 'servant I' does not bind one to the world. Why do we say the ego is despicable? Because it binds us. But how can the ego that does not bind be despicable? So there is nothing wrong in the 'servant I', the 'devotee I', the 'child I'. Why? It is true that through the path of knowledge one can completely eliminate the ego, but for how many is it possible to rigorously pursue the path of knowledge till the end? One cannot be established in Self-knowledge unless one is able to get rid of the body-sense; in other words it means till one no longer identifies his or her Self with the body. From the toddler to the old man, from a fool to a pundit, all identify the body with the Self. That is why the Master said: 'No matter how much we may say, "The thorns do not hurt me", as soon as we grasp the thorny branch of a tree, it hurts us and we cry out.' Let alone ordinary people, the mind of such an exalted saint as Totapuri also had to come down on account of the body. So strong is our identification with the body! Now when a jñānī faces such a situation, what can ordinary people do? What method must an aspirant adopt in order to get rid of the 'wicked I' which binds, and to attain the 'pure I'? This 'pure I' does not harm us; so there is no need of any harsh sādhanā to efface it. Even if there is any need, it is beyond our capacity. Therefore the Master said: 'In the Kaliyuga the life of a man is centred on food. He cannot get rid of the feeling that he is the body and the ego. Therefore the path of devotion is prescribed for this cycle.' In the Kaliyuga a man's mind is engrossed in the body.

Devotion in the Kaliyuga

We somehow imagine that the age of the Upanishad was the Age of Righteousness (Satyayuga). But even in that age the

Upanishad said: 'The Self-created Lord has created the sense organs with the inherent defect that they are by nature outgoing. This is why beings see things outside and cannot see the Self within.'² So it is an eternal truth and applies to all people at all times. Is it true that the influence of the Kaliyuga is only in the modern times? The Kaliyuga is always present. This is because at no period of time have human beings been free from this 'body-is-everything' idea, whether it is the Satyayuga, the Tretāyuga, or the Dwāparayuga. Besides, we see in this very age that there are people who could be said to really belong to the Satya, Tretā, or Dwāpara yugas. Again, even in the Satyayuga there were said to be people of demoniac nature, as in the Kaliyuga. So yugas (ages) cannot be divided in this way. We blame the Kaliyuga so much. It has been said in the *Bhāgavata*: 'O king! Many people who were born in earlier yugas (kritādishu) long to be born in Kaliyuga.'³ Krita means the Satyayuga. Even the people of the Satyayuga wished to be born in the Kaliyuga. They thought that had they been born in the Kaliyuga, then there would be no need for such austere spiritual practices. One could easily attain the goal by resorting to the path of devotion. This is to explain that people with high and low mental faculties live in all ages. Again, there are also means of deliverance even while remaining in all these. For ordinary people the way is devotion. In whichever age it may be, if one proceeds along the easily accessible path of devotion, then what is the need for the path of knowledge, or for so much austerities, or for such ostentatious display of activities, such as sacrifices running into thousands of years? In the Purānas we find that someone performed austerities for ten thousand years. These days we hardly live for one hundred years. So what do we gain by bothering ourselves with such thoughts?

The purpose of all this is not to suggest that the path of knowledge is not a path at all. Jñāna yoga is certainly a path, but how many of us have the strength to pursue it? A few people may have the strength, but it will always remain

beyond the reach of others. So that path is the best which conforms to our standards and is within our capacity. Therefore it cannot be said that one yoga is good and another is not. The path that suits one most is the best for a person. Plenty of costly medicines are available in the market, but can we be cured of our ailment by taking any of the available medicines? To cure our ailment we have to take only that medicine which is precisely effective for our illness.

The Bhāgavata and the Three Yogas

The *Bhāgavata* speaks of three kinds of Yogas—Bhakti yoga (the path of devotion), Jñāna yoga (the path of knowledge), and Karma yoga (the path of action). The path of knowledge is exclusively for those who have totally renounced worldly objects, who have no desires, and who have renounced all actions. Of course, here 'action' refers to desire-oriented worldly acts. An act performed with 'I shall-gain-this-by-doing-this' attitude is called desire-oriented action. The path of action is prescribed for those whose desires and passions are strong. Because of intense desire, they begin by following the scriptural injunctions with a view to obtaining specific results. Thus they slowly go to higher and higher planes. That is why they begin by performing deeds with a desire for the results. There are people who are not very strict in their attitude of renunciation of worldly objects, but neither are they keen to enjoy worldly comforts; they are not slaves to passions driving them away from the path of God, but they do not have such renunciation that their minds are never drawn towards worldly objects. Such people are to follow the path of devotion. What is food for one may be poison for another. That is why the Bhaktiyogīs are afraid of Jñāna yoga and the Jñānayogīs disregard the path of devotion, while both look down upon the Karmayogīs. But all these are paths towards the goal; so no path is despicable. One can only move forward step by step from where one stands. Can one reach the roof in

one bound? One can reach the roof by climbing one step after another. Now if we despise the steps because they are at lower level, then we shall never be able to reach the roof. We must follow our paths with sincerity and yearning. When we do not even have an intense longing to follow our own path, we criticize others' ways and think of them as insignificant. If an aspirant follows the chosen path with intense longing and sincerity of purpose, can he or she afford to look at others' paths and criticize them?

So it is necessary to search our hearts to ascertain to which path we belong. If we are full of renunciation, we may go for the path of knowledge. But if we are not really of that type, then our decision to follow the path of knowledge shall land us in such difficulty as would not allow us to proceed further in spiritual life.

The Master then said: 'The "I" that feels, "I am the servant of God, I am His devotee" does not injure one.' Because that 'I' does not bind one with such fetters as cannot easily be severed. A jñānī discards his ego as unreal, while a devotee, by intensely contemplating on God, attains such a state that all his meanness and imperfections totally disappear.

The Devotee Attains Supreme Knowledge

Now Vijaykrishna enquired: 'Well, sir, what becomes of lust, anger, and other passions of one who keeps the "servant I"?' The Master replied: 'If a man truly feels like that, then he has only the semblance of lust, anger, and the like; ... these cannot harm him anymore.' It is like a burnt rope; it looks like a rope, no doubt, but it ceases to function as a rope. It is not possible to tie something with it.

Initially, however, it is necessary to assume the ego of either the 'servant I', or the 'devotee I'. God is not known; therefore it is necessary to imagine oneself as 'His servant' or 'His devotee' and contemplate on Him. Contemplating in this way, one attains perfection in this attitude, and then one

realizes God. God is Almighty. If He so wishes He can certainly bestow Brahmajnāna on anyone. So it is possible even for a devotee to obtain Brahmajnāna from God. Therefore, Brahmajnāna does not belong exclusively to the followers of the path of knowledge. One can attain it through the path of devotion as well. The Master explained it with the help of an example. It is like an old servant in a household who always keeps himself separate from his master. But if some day the master desires to make the servant sit beside himself, can he really stay away? No, he cannot. He has to sit beside his master. Devotees normally do not ask for Brahmajnāna. As Rāmaprasād sang: 'I don't want to be sugar. I want to eat it.' The devotee wants to keep himself separate from God while enjoying Him in any of the different attitudes—the peaceful attitude (śānta), the servant attitude (dāśya), the friend attitude (sakhya), the motherly attitude (vātsalya) and the attitude of a lover (madhura). This is how a devotee feels: He who is the Almighty, who can give anything and everything, can He not bestow Brahmajnāna on His devotee? But the devotee does not want it. And if he prefers to enjoy the bliss of God eternally it is up to him. There is nothing wrong in it. What is wrong is a bhakta thinking that the jñānīs are bland and dry. It is because he cannot understand that other aspirants enjoy the same bliss that he does through a different path. Both the jñānīs and the bhaktas suffer from this one-sidedness. Even such a great jñānī like Totapuri commented derisively when the Master was chanting the name of God, clapping hands: 'Hey, are you making chapātīs by clapping your hands?'

The Special Teaching of Sri Ramakrishna

In this regard Sri Ramakrishna put forth a special teaching. He said: 'Be steadfast in your own ideal, but at the same time respect others' ideals too. Regard one another with respect. Be sympathetic to others' beliefs, but follow your own path with unwavering faith.' This, indeed, is the special

teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. This is the appropriate ideal for the modern age. And herein lies the relevance of Sri Ramakrishna as the Incarnation of this age.

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1. *Yathodakam śuddhe śuddhamāsiktam tādrigeva bhavati,
Evam munervijānata ātmā bhavati Gautama.*

— *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.15

2. *Parānchi khāni vyatrinat svayambhu-
stasmāt parāṅ paśyati nāntarātman.*

— *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.1

3. *Kritādishu prajā rājan kalāvicchanti sambhavam...*

— *Bhāgavata*, 11.5.38

CHAPTER 20

The Gospel (December 14, 1882)

The Master was ceaselessly talking about God with Vijaykrishna Goswami at the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar.

Earlier the Master had discussed getting rid of the 'wicked I' and retaining the 'devotee I' or, the 'servant I', because such an 'I' does not cause any harm. What constitutes right or wrong? That which takes us to God is right, and that which takes us away from God is wrong. The 'devotee I' and the 'servant I' keep us a little away from God. But this distance does not prevent us from enjoying the bliss of God.

The Path of Knowledge is Difficult

A question was raised as to why the little difference between a devotee and God should persist. The Master replied to that: 'To efface one's own identity and separateness from God is easier said than done.' We may say that since our real nature is beyond the gunas we are free from its effects. But even when we say so we know that we are not at all free. So long as there is a difference between one's words and one's heart, a person can never reach the goal. The Lord says in the *Gītā*: 'For them whose minds are attached to the Unmanifest, the struggle is greater; for the Goal which is the Unmanifest is attained with difficulty by embodied ones.'¹

To reach the Unmanifest is difficult because neither can one approach It, as It is beyond mind and speech, nor can one feel inclined to enjoy It through some other path. So the

Master cautioned against the attitude of 'I am He.' He did not say that it was a wrong ideal; he only said it was not easy for ordinary people to pursue this ideal. I may say 'I am He' while scores of doubts and attachments continue to plague me. So by saying 'I am He' we not only deceive ourselves but also confound others. If we leave the path which suits us and go after some other path for which we are not fit, our position is like the small boy who wears his father's shoes leaving his own. The boy cannot move as a result, and similarly, we are unable to progress in our path of sādhanā.

Thus we lose both goals. We lose the 'other goal' because we could not reach it. We lose 'this goal' because we thought the path which was best suited for us was an inferior one and lost interest in it. Therefore, we must sincerely perform the sādhanā that is within our capacity, and have faith in it. This is most important. If we do not have faith in our chosen path of sādhanā, if the thought haunts our mind that it is an inferior path, then that sādhanā can never carry us ahead. A Bengali couplet says: 'That is the best ideal which appeals to one's mind. When judged carefully one finds a better one behind.' During sādhanā an aspirant's own attitude is the best for him, because he can make progress only with its help. But no matter with which attitude an aspirant proceeds, when judged after reaching it, he invariably finds a still better one to approach God.

It is like when an aspirant says that he will perform non-dualistic sādhanā with the attitude 'I am He'. In that case he cannot practise any sādhanā at all. Because if I am Brahman, then who is to do sādhanā? If I conceive of myself as non-different from Brahman, if I accept this non-dualistic conclusion from the very beginning, then the question of sādhanā does not arise at all.

The Supreme Truth

If we think carefully we will understand that there exists a still higher attitude than 'I am Brahman', where one cannot

even say 'I am Brahman'. The statement 'I am Brahman' is made only after accepting the difference that I am one and Brahman is another. Thus the mind still possesses the sense of difference. Indeed, what is the significance of using two words 'I' and 'He'? The idea of difference is false; or, it is not true. But this belief of the falsity of duality is not the consummation of sādhanā. After reaching it, if we judge well, we shall see that there is a higher stage in which an Advaitin declares: 'The highest truth is that there is no destruction, no origination, none in bondage, none striving or aspiring for salvation, and none liberated.'² The supreme Truth is that there is nothing called destruction or negation. There is nothing called creation or origination. There is no bondage. And there is nothing called a seeker after liberation. All the terms related to non-dualistic sādhanā are used admitting an imaginary object. It is as if we consider ourselves as being non-dualistic sādhakas presuming imaginary objects to be real. Who is this 'I'? Where is its location? What is its nature? If its nature is different from Brahman, then the expression 'I am Brahman' cannot be true. If, however, the ego is non-different from Brahman, then the conception 'I am Brahman' becomes meaningless. A relationship develops only when there are differences between two objects. If the object is one and the same, what relationship can exist for something with itself? So when, during sādhanā, it is stated 'I am Brahman', it is done only after accepting the imaginary distinction as true. But the moment we accept this imaginary distinction as true we necessarily have dualistic ideas. Therefore, when we try to look at these ideas being established in the supreme Truth we shall find that there is no justification for dualistic notions at all. There is no seeker after liberation, nor is there anyone liberated.

The question of liberation arises only if bondage is true. When bondage itself is untrue, how can liberation be true? Therefore, the idea of dualism is valid from all angles of vision through which we speak of the different paths of sādhanā. If

this dualism is not present in the transcendental realm, it is very obvious in the phenomenal world. All the scriptures and all forms of sādhanā are concerned only with this phenomenal world.

Dualism in Sādhanā

While interpreting the *Brahmasutras*, Śankarāchārya states in the very beginning of his Adhyāsabhāṣya: 'All activities pertaining to the phenomenal and the non-phenomenal world are intermixed with truth and falsehood.' All activities include those of the phenomenal world as also those enunciated in the Vedas. Viewed from this angle even the Vedas cannot be called eternal. The eternal is but One. Perhaps it is also wrong to say One. Eternal is where all duality ceases, and this is termed 'non-dual' in the Vedānta philosophy. Now who is Brahman? It is no longer possible to say who He is in words. The fact that He eludes all descriptions does not indicate the speaker's inability to describe Him. He cannot be described because He is beyond speech and mind. 'From where speech and the mind too return, having failed to grasp Him.'³ And this speech is not limited to that of the mundane world alone. It includes the words of the Vedas, which also face the same problem. The Vedas never claim that they are capable of expressing the Truth. They say, 'Where the Vedas turn out to be *avedā* [the state of ignorance].' So the scriptures and the activities of the phenomenal world, plus those sanctioned by the Vedas, indeed, nothing is applicable there. Even non-dualistic sādhanā falls under this category. If we can understand this much, we will refrain from taking pride in saying, 'I am Brahman'. Who am I? Whom do I try to eulogize? Who is the higher authority?—Who will answer all these questions? If one who has attained supreme Knowledge is superior then who is he superior to? Viewed in the light of Reality he has no separate identity. Then how can he become superior, and to whom? That which is unreal is unreal. Can there be any qualitative

difference between 'small' or 'big' unreality in the unreal world? But one can transcend this unreal world by resorting to any one of the many methods that are available. But one must keep in mind that these methods are also unreal. Any method, because it is a method, is necessarily unreal. In this way, non-dualistic sādhanā is unreal, and so also is dualistic sādhanā.

Two Types of Errors

There are errors that lead us to truth which are termed samvāḍibhrama in the scriptures. There are two kinds of error—samvāḍibhrama and asamvāḍibhrama. Suppose a person sees a flicker of light amidst darkness. He feels that the light comes from a gem. He then tries to secure the gem. Tracing the flicker of light he finds that what he thought to be a gem is actually the light from a hole in the closed door of a temple. He opens the door and actually finds a gem and understands that it was the gem's light which was passing through the hole. And, indeed, he had thought that the flicker of light itself was the gem. Thus, the object which the person thought to be a gem later turns out not to be so. But still, by tracing the false object he actually gets the gem, or arrives at the truth.

In the same way, another person traces the flicker of light, thinking it to be a gem, and finds that the light is coming from a hole in the temple door. Opening the door he finds a lamp is burning. There is no gem. The first case, where the person actually gets the gem by tracing the light, is termed as samvāḍibhrama, or the error which leads one to truth. Where such endeavour does not lead one to the gem, or to the truth, it is termed as asamvāḍibhrama.

Now all the methods specified by the scriptures are errors from the transcendental standpoint. But they take us to truth either directly or through inter-connecting methods. So they are termed as samvāḍibhrama. The other methods that do not take us to truth are asamvāḍibhrama.

Faith in One's Own Attitude

If we contemplate on God with attributes and as possessed of a personality like us, then somehow or other we shall finally arrive at the supreme Truth. So even though we may pass through illusion, the illusion is samvādibhrama, as it makes us attain the Truth. All the scriptural injunctions we have are like this samvādibhrama. The scriptural injunctions are like the Arundhati Nyāya. If one says, 'Look, there is the star Arundhati,' nobody can spot it. It is therefore necessary to draw one's attention to the constellation of Ursa Major (the Saptarshi mandala), which an ordinary person can easily locate. Next, attention is to be drawn to Vaśistha, the third star on the tail of the constellation. Then one is to look with fixed attention at a very indistinct star with a faint glow just by its side. That is the star called Arundhati. In the same manner, if efforts are made to explain the supreme Truth at the beginning itself, nobody will be able to understand it. That is why God is given a form and attributes so as to make Him compatible to our varied tastes. And by attributing to Him our familiar emotional relationships, calling Him Mother, Friend, or the Lord, following different scriptural injunctions, we attain Him. The Master then says that the Lord Himself will tell us what His nature is. He will let us know the diversity that abounds in Him, and also that His nature is beyond this diversity. The essential point is that we have to have fix our mind on Him with unwavering concentration. Either way we have to banish our small ego. This is called sādhanā—be it through the non-dualistic or the dualistic path, or through any other familiar path or emotional relationship.

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Avyaktā hi gatirduhkham dehavadbhiravāpyate.*

— *Gītā*, 12.5

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Na mumukṣurna vai mukta ityeshā paramārthatā.*

—*Māndukya Kārikā*, 2.32

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—*Taittirīya Upanishad*, 2.4.1

CHAPTER 21

The Gospel (December 14, 1882)

Sri Ramakrishna continued his discussion about God with Sri Vijaykrishna Goswami and other devotees at the Dakshin-eshwar temple.

Vaidhī Bhakti

While discussing devotion the Master placed special emphasis on rāga bhakti (supreme devotion) and said: 'Yes, one can see God through bhakti alone. But it must be "ripe" bhakti, premā bhakti or rāga bhakti.' But an aspirant can only start from where he stands. And the way to this loving devotion (rāga bhakti) lies through the path of preparatory devotion (vaidhī bhakti). If anyone decides not to think of God till rāga bhakti is attained he will never be able to think of Him. When one is filled with sublime love for Him, then there will be no need for any other sādhanā at all. There will be no more formal rituals, no more japa or recitation, no strict compliance with austere injunctions. Then one only enjoys the ever-abiding bliss that is Him. Indeed, through the path of devotion many devotees and saints have reached the state which is beyond all rules. But none of us should try to follow this devotion which is beyond all rules at the initial stages. It is because we must begin with the conviction that if we are to acquire devotion it is only through the path of disciplined spiritual practice. But the more we progress, the more our understanding becomes clearer and purer, and we come to realize that no matter how intense our

sādhana is, it is never adequate to realize God. Only when we truly realize this, will the real sense of dependence on God come to us. The scriptures say, and so do the saints, that the grace of God and His compassion will fall on an aspirant only when his ego is subdued and the pride that he can see God through sādhana is humbled; that is, when the aspirant feels that he is helpless and surrenders completely. Of course, divine grace has no rules. It can never be said that such and such an action will usher in God's grace and others will not. But it is only after a long struggle that an aspirant has the desire to surrender totally to His grace. In this context we may recall one incident: Swami Turiyananda, then known as Hari of Bāghbazār, did not come to visit the Master for sometime. Sri Ramakrishna learnt on enquiry that Hari was engaged in the study of Vedānta, but he did not say anything at that time. Some days later, when he visited Balaram Bose's house at Bāghbazār, he sent word for Hari to come and see him. Hari came and found the Master seated in the hall surrounded by devotees. He was singing a song and tears were streaming from his eyes. His chest was wet, and the carpet at his feet too was wet with his tears. The song being sung was: 'O Kuśa and Lava! Be not thus proud. Could you catch me if I had not allowed?' The twin brothers, Lava and Kuśa, had tied up Hanumān and brought him before their mother Sītā and said: 'Do you see, O Mother? We have captured such a big monkey.' Then Hanumān sang: 'Could you catch me if I had not allowed?' An aspirant feels that by his sādhana he is certain to realize God. What he does not know is that his sādhana, even though stretching over thousands of births, is insignificant to attract Him. Hearing the Master's song, Hari understood his mistake. No question was asked and there was no need for any instruction either.

Rāga bhakti

The Master said: 'But some acquire rāga bhakti directly. It is innate in them. They have it from their very childhood.... An

instance of such bhakti is to be found in Prahlāda.' Prahlāda did not have to learn devotion from anybody; rather, his devotion naturally found unrestrained manifestation amidst hostile surroundings. When one spontaneously feels such bhakti within oneself then there is no need for ritualistic devotion anymore.

There is a beautiful couplet of Tulsidās in this regard: 'Practices as Tulsī performs are all mere play with dolls, When one is with the Beloved, in a basket put them all.' He says that whatever japa and austerity one performs may be compared to a girl playing with her dolls in a dolls' house. After she grows up, she enters her real household and meets her husband. Then she puts away those dolls in a basket. In the same way, performing japa or austerity is like indulging in dolls' play with God. The justification for such activities lies in keeping up the practice of these mental modes (vrittis). But when one spontaneously feels love and attachment for God, such actions as japa and austerity drop away. Everything then appears like playing with dolls. Who indeed will perform japa and with what goal in view? Yaśodā was yearning for Sri Krishna; Uddhava then came and advised her: 'He dwells in the heart and can be reached by meditation on Him. Why do you grieve so much for Him?' Yaśodā replied: 'How can I meditate? Where's the mind with which to meditate? It has long ago been given away to Him.' As there is no mind, the instrument for sādhanā is also absent. Indeed, this is a very beautiful example. When an aspirant is absorbed in Him, there is hardly any need for sādhanā. So long as God is distant and we do not feel an irresistible attraction for Him, sādhanā is necessary. But when we are filled with love for Him, there is no further need of formal sādhanā.

Attaining God through Premā Bhakti

Vijaykrishna puts another question: 'Is bhakti alone sufficient for the attainment of God, for His vision?' The

question betrays his doubt in the matter. Devotion is a mental modification. Can one realize God with that alone? The Master said: 'Yes, one can see God through bhakti alone. But it must be "ripe" bhakti, premā bhakti or rāga bhakti. When one has that bhakti, one loves God even as the mother loves the child, the child the mother, or the wife the husband.' A question very often arises in our minds: what are the signs that bhakti has been acquired? The Master said: 'When one has such love and attachment for God, one doesn't feel the attraction of māyā to wife, children, relatives, and friends.' Does an aspirant become a tree or a stone then? The Master said: 'One retains compassion for them.' So, lest we misunderstand, he added the words 'retains compassion for them'. 'I' and 'mine' breed attachment (māyā) while compassion (dayā) is love for all beings. A mother does not show compassion to her child. She is full of attachment to it. Because there the sense of 'mine' such as 'my Rām' or 'my Hari', prevails. If a mother feels the same towards all, then that cannot be called attachment at all. But instead of becoming so, her love finds expression only where the 'my' sense prevails. That is why it is called māyā. The difference between compassion and attachment is this: dayā brings liberation, while māyā binds. So the Master said on many occasions: 'Dayā is good, but not māyā.' The Master further said: 'A man with "green" bhakti cannot assimilate spiritual talk and instruction; but one with "ripe" bhakti can.' He clarified this through an example: 'The image that falls on a photographic plate covered with black film (silver nitrate) is retained. On the other hand, thousands of images may be reflected on a bare piece of glass, but not one of them is retained.' Unless one has already developed love for God, how can the talk about Him who is the embodiment of love leave any impression in the mind? When a person develops love for God the world appears unreal. There is a song: 'Let us go back once more, O mind, to our own abode! Here in this foreign land of earth why should we wander aimlessly in stranger's guise?'

This world then appears like a foreign country. One's own land means where the Lord is. He is the sole object of love. He is the only Beloved. We feel attracted towards other objects because He is present in them in a small way. But He alone is the real object of attraction. Why do we love Him? We love Him because of Him alone and nothing else. We do not think of His attributes. He Himself is adequate. God pervades our entire mind. This is called *premā bhakti*.

Features of Premā Bhakti

When one has such *premā bhakti* then all sense of worldliness vanishes. One cannot see God if one has even the slightest trace of worldliness. Many people say that at that stage they have various divine visions. So they ask: 'Are we really proceeding towards God?' The test of this is whether or not we are developing distaste for worldly pleasures. Is our attraction for them diminishing? There is a verse in the *Bhāgavata* which says that if one takes refuge in God, the following three characteristics manifest simultaneously: namely, his devotion to God increases, his realization of the true nature of God becomes clearer, and his attachment to the pleasures of the world diminishes more and more. When a man suffers from hunger, he feels physically exhausted and weak, and his senses fail to function. But when he gets food, with the taking of every morsel, his hunger disappears, his exhaustion also goes, and he feels stronger physically. In the same way, as one develops love for God, one experiences all the three feelings—attraction for God, distaste for worldly objects, and a clear concept of God. Such a great sweetness fills one's mind that all other things seem insipid. 'Obtaining which one does not think of any other acquisition to be superior to that, and being established in which one is not perturbed even by great sorrow.'¹

When this happens, the swelling, surging ocean of love sweeps away all the joys and sorrows of the world. Indeed,

this is the test by which we are to judge if our experiences are genuine or not.

Dispassion and the Destruction of Doubts

Once a brahmachārī was doing sādhanā at Uttarkashi. He said: 'Look, Swamiji, as I sit for meditation I see Lord Krishna playing His flute and thirty three-crores of people before Him.' He was trying to say that he must have reached a very exalted state of sādhanā!

The Master said: 'There is a way to test all this.' If one finds that one's mind rests in Him with unwavering concentration, that worldly possessions no longer appeal to one and that all doubts about Him have melted away, then one may consider such visions as true. Otherwise, they are mere hallucinations. Imagination can never be true, no matter how charming it may be. Of course, one has to start sādhanā imagining a form of God. But we should be careful not to consider those imaginations as real. We begin our journey with such imageries and end by attaining His lotus feet. And the proof that we are making progress in the right direction is that our love for Him deepens and we discard all doubts about His existence. These features are axiomatic and realizable in one's own mind. Nobody knows better than ourselves as to where our minds lead us. Sometimes we may put up a show before others so as to project ourselves as great devotees. But one cannot conceal one's true nature before one's own self.

Introspection

If we honestly do some introspection we shall soon come to understand our mental make-up—whether we are sincere or are deceiving ourselves. Once a worshipper of Mother Kālī was extremely eager to have Her vision. He enquired with whomsoever he met: 'Can you please show me the vision of Mother Kālī?' A certain person responded: 'Yes, I can.' Then he

told him in a manner that seemed convincing: 'On the new moon day the Mother's worship shall be performed at the dead of night in the cremation ground. These are the required things that you should procure. You'll then have Kālī's vision.' Needless to say, the charges for the worship were very high. When everything was arranged, he was told: 'Now shut your eyes and meditate on the Mother's image.' He did as advised. After a while he was told: 'Look, the Mother has appeared.' Opening his eyes he found, indeed, the Mother stood before him. He kept staring at the Mother for sometime and then said: 'Mother, now that you have appeared, how come my mind is not filled with joy? The vision of the Mother of the universe should fill the mind with overflowing bliss. But I do not have any such feeling!' Saying so, he was about to bow down at the feet of the Mother. Then that mother cried: 'My child, please leave me. I don't know anything. That old brahmin caught hold of me by alluring me with some money.' This example is cited here to make one understand that one cannot play tricks on oneself. If we calmly examine ourselves, then our mind will tell us if we are really progressing on the spiritual path or not. The Master said: 'Suppose you are separating rice from husk. Every now and then you have to take the rice in your hand to see how clean it is.' In the same way, we should examine ourselves well during sādhanā to see whether we are really making any progress or not. The Master said: 'I have seen peasants bringing water into their paddy-fields. The fields have low ridges on all sides to prevent the water from leaking out; but these are made of mud and often have holes.' We shall have to find out the 'holes' and maintain a constant vigil against theft of the treasures acquired through sādhanā. These holes represent our attachment for worldly objects. They pull us down with such force that it neutralizes everything we have gained from our sādhanā. It is like the drunkard who, after rowing all night found himself at the same spot where the boat had been because the anchor was not weighed. For the same reason we often find that in spite of

years of japa and austerity we do not appear to have attained anything. The chains of 'I' and 'mine' have completely bound us. We have tied ourselves with the rope of hundreds of desires— lust, greed, and so on— in such a manner that despite performing spiritual practices for years, we have not made any headway. That is why we often feel confused, and the question arises, are we really making any progress after performing such arduous sādhanā? At that time we should examine ourselves and ascertain whether we are really progressing or not. It has been stated in the *Gītā* that one must know where the obstacles are, and only then will it be easy to overcome them. So there is a need for self-analysis. I cannot expect to know anybody else the way I know myself. It is repeatedly advised in the *Gītā* to be straight-forward. The devotional scriptures also enjoin us to become simple-hearted. The Master said time and again: 'God cannot be realized without guilelessness.'

REFERENCE

1. *Yam labdhvā chāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tatah,
Yasminsthito na dukkhena gurunāpi vichalyate.*

—*Gītā*, 6.22

CHAPTER 22

The Gospel (March 11, 1883)

Sri Ramakrishna sat in his room at Dakshineswar surrounded by devotees. It was a special day. Many of his disciples and devotees were celebrating the happy occasion of the Master's birthday. The details of the day's events are recorded in several chapters (in the original Bengali work). M. reached there in the morning and saw everything that happened throughout the day.

Bhavanath, Rakhal, and Bhavanath's friend Kalikrishna were present. Bhavanath and Kalikrishna started singing: 'Thrice blessed is this day of joy! May all of us unite, O, Lord,...' As Sri Ramakrishna listened to the song, his mind soared to a far-off realm and remained absorbed in meditation for a long time. Later, Kalikrishna got up to leave. He was teaching in the 'Workingmen's Institute'. However, the Master did not feel happy about him leaving. He said: 'It's his bad luck. A stream of bliss will flow here today. He could have enjoyed it. But how unlucky!' Despite the fact that the reason for his leaving was good, it was insignificant in comparison with the joy he could have had in such holy company.

The Master usually took his bath around eight or nine o'clock in the morning. That day, however, he was careful, and as he had a cold, he decided not to bathe in the Ganges but to take his bath with a few jars of water drawn from the river. He would not pour more than a one pot of water over his head. Why was he so careful? A lot of good work would be done

through this instrument for the Divine Mother, so it was necessary to carefully maintain it.

After bathing, the Master put on a new set of clothes and walked across the temple courtyard to the Kālī temple, Vishnu temple, and Śiva temples to offer his salutations. He was chanting all the while the names of God. M. wrote that the Master's 'eyes had an indrawn look, like that of a bird hatching her eggs'. He returned to his room after that.

The Master's Words of Caution to Nityagopal

Many devotees came that day, among whom were Ram, Nityagopal, and Kedar. The Master was very fond of Nityagopal. He now and then said that Nityagopal was in the state of a paramahansa. A certain devout woman, impressed by Nityagopal's childlike demeanour, was very fond of him and often invited him to her place. His high spiritual state notwithstanding, the Master cautioned him: 'Beware, holy man! Go there once in a great while, but not frequently; otherwise you will slip from the ideal.' We may observe that the Master did not doubt their relationship, and so he did not ask him to stop going there totally. But one never knows when the weakness of the mind might intrude to spoil the relationship. Hence, the word of caution. Such caution is always necessary. The women devotees said that the Master would not allow them to stay near him for a long time. He behaved thus in order to teach people. The Master's words of caution were meant not only for men, they were for women as well. Men and women should always remain alert about each other. The Holy Mother used to say: 'I love everyone very much. But I cannot mix freely with all in this body.' She is the Mother, our own Mother, the Mother of the world (Jaganmātā). Even then she spoke like thus. This caution is necessary to set an ideal for ordinary people.

The scriptures say that a sannyāsī should always keep away from women. The same ideal should be followed in

society too. A reasonable distance should be maintained as far as practicable. Many organizations were destroyed by not observing this caution. Gandhiji was a great moralist. Men and women used to live freely as members of a family at his Sevāgrām. Later, after a few bitter experiences, he realized that it was a mistake to allow such mixing, and he closed down the āshrama. The scriptures have the foresight to caution us in advance. About sannyāsīs they say, 'A sannyāsi shall not even touch with his foot the wooden image of a woman.' Such stern language is used ! Of course, they say this so that due caution is observed, and ladies should not misunderstand. We have read in the life of the Master that he once sat on the lap of Gopaler-Ma. He was then fully immersed in the mood of baby Krishna (Gopāla). Again, at Mathur's house in Janbazar, the Master, Mathur, and the latter's wife all slept in the same bed. They thought of Sri Ramakrishna as their own baby. But only the Master could do this. Is it ever possible for anybody else? And should anyone else emulate such behaviour?

The words of great teachers are to be followed and not their behaviour. The *Bhāgavata* says, 'Do as you are told to do and not as they do'. It may not always be good for us. We should keep this in mind. M. was struck by the Master's words and that set him thinking. He realized why Sri Chaitanya had so severely reprimanded the younger Haridās. It was not because Sri Chaitanya was annoyed with him. He banished Haridās in order to set an ideal of sannyāsa before the world. The Master's warning, 'Beware, holy man!' made a deep impression on M.'s mind.

Anāhata Śabda

The Master later went with the devotees to the northeast verandah of his room. One of the devotees, a resident of Dakshineswar, spoke about the anāhata śabda in the context of Vedānta philosophy. That which is produced by something striking against something else is sound (śabda), such as,

sound generated by clapping the hands, or a stick whirled in the air, because of the stick striking against the air. We perceive with our ears this sound that is due to this striking. Speaking about the anāhata śabda (unstruck sound), the Master observed: 'But the Word (śabda) is not enough. There must be something indicated by the Word.' The anāhata śabda is the great Cause—the origin of Om. What does a word indicate? Or, if 'Brahman' is a word what does it denote? That resident of Dakshineshwar said, 'That Word itself is Brahman.' This is a doctrine of the rishis of olden times. They do not admit that this diversity exists in a gross form. They only accepted śabda as the Cause of this world.

Rāmachandra as an Avatāra

The Master spoke about the ancient sages (rishis). He said that the sages of Rāma's time did not accept him as an Avatāra. They wanted to realize Brahman, the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Here Kedar Chatterji said: 'Those rishis could not recognize Rāma as an Incarnation of God. They must have been fools.' The Master replied rather seriously: 'Please don't say such a thing. People worship God according to their tastes and temperaments.... The rishis were spiritual aspirants of a very high order and followed the path of jñāna. Therefore they sought to realize Brahman, the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.' The devotees, however, want a personal God to enjoy the bliss of devotion. In one of the Purāṇas it is said that when Rāma entered the court the lotus in the heart of those present immediately blossomed. No sooner did the Master say these words than he went into deep samādhi. The devotees too forgot the external world, watching that wonderful samādhi.

After a long time the Master returned to normal consciousness. He had gone into samādhi while speaking about Rāma, and he returned to normal consciousness repeating Rāma's name. Slowly he came down from that transcendental

plane. He then spoke about the doctrine of divine Incarnation to the devotees: 'Ordinary people do not recognize the advent of an Incarnation of God. He comes in secret. Only a few of His intimate disciples can recognize Him. That Rāma was both Brahman Absolute and a perfect Incarnation of God in human form was known only to twelve rishis.' Only an aspirant whose love for God is perfect can taste the bliss of both—His real nature, which is beyond all diversity, as also the form in which He sports in this relative world. Such a person enjoys God's sport. He is in the state of a *vijnānī*. It is said in the *Bhāgavata* that the *gopīs* knew that Sri Krishna was the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute but they wanted that form of Sri Krishna in which he sported as their playmate.

CHAPTER 23

The Gospel (March 11, 1883)

It is incomprehensible to us how the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, which is beyond speech and mind, can appear before us in a human form. Who has the strength or courage to realize that infinite cosmic form of God? That is why He appears as a human being. When He comes in this form, human beings can approach Him and love Him. Otherwise, how is it possible for people to think, even in their wildest imagination, about God, who is beyond speech and mind?

Presently some devotees from Konnagar arrived, singing kīrtan to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. The Master joined them in the music, dancing intoxicated with divine joy. Like Sri Chaitanya, the Master too passed alternately through three moods of divine consciousness: the inmost, when he completely lost all knowledge of the outer world; the semiconscious, when he danced with the devotees in an ecstasy of love; and the conscious, when he joined them in loud singing. Sri Chaitanya used to experience all these states during ecstasy. There are references to this in the book *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*. M. saw the Master in the same states of ecstasy that Sri Chaitanya used to experience.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna put on a new yellow cloth. It has now become a tradition at Belur Math to dress the Master in a yellow cloth on his birth anniversary. The blissful, divine, pure beauty of the Master enchanted the eyes of the devotees, who kept looking at him. The Master took his meal and the devotees gladly received prasād.

After his meal the Master rested for a while on the small couch. The devotees were both inside and outside his room.

The Sanctity of God's Name

A Vaishnava goswāmī came to see Sri Ramakrishna that day. He said, 'The scriptures emphasize the sanctity of God's name for the Kaliyuga.' The Master told him: 'Yes, there is no doubt about the sanctity of God's name. But can a mere name achieve anything, without the yearning love of the devotee behind it? Suppose a man repeats the name of God mechanically, while his mind is absorbed in "woman and gold". Can he achieve anything?' The Master did not give undue importance to the divine name. Rather, he felt that the idea behind the name should be kept in mind. Ordinarily it is said that merely repeating God's name is good enough, whether done with devotion or not. The example of Ajāmila is often cited in support of this. Ajāmila's son's name was Nārāyana. Ajāmila called his son when he was dying and was thus liberated. But this story is narrated so that faith in God's name is generated. The truth is, while repeating the holy name, one should also think about what it means. The scriptures do not teach us to repeat God's names mechanically. Should those who are on the path to God mutter like parrots? The parrot that always repeats 'Rādhākṛishna' will squawk when a cat catches it. Then it does not repeat 'Rādhākṛishna' even once. To the bird, 'Rādhākṛishna' is a mere sound and not a mantra. It does not know its significance. The glory of the divine name is understood when we try to understand the meaning of the mantra with our intellect. We should contemplate on it and try to realize its significance. Are we really performing japa when we go on repeating the mantra while our mind roams about anywhere it wants? We should contemplate on the name and think intensely about the Deity named by it. The Master did not want to say anything to hurt anybody's faith in the sanctity of the divine name. As regards Ajāmila he simply said,

'Perhaps Ajāmila had done many spiritual things in his past births.'

The Master further said that while repeating God's name one should also pray to Him that one 'may have love for Him.' During sādhanā, when we are practising meditation and repeating God's name, we should specially bear this in mind. We should be determined to attain perfection through our sādhanā. But for this it is necessary to build our character and acquire love for God. We should have such intense faith in the sanctity of the divine name that it will completely change our mind.

Dogmatism

Sri Ramakrishna pointed out our weaknesses. If we have sincerity and earnestness we can realize God through any religion. The Vaishnavas, the Śāktas, the Vedāntists, the Brāhmos, the Moslems, and the Christians—everyone can realize God. It is simply bigotry to say, 'My religion alone is true, and the religions of others are false.' During those days there were bitter quarrels over whether God was formless or had forms. Under the influence of the Brāhmo religion many people believed that God is One and Formless and He cannot be anything else. Islam and Christianity also cast their influence, and the idea of God with form was criticized in many ways.

That was why the Master said: 'He who has seen God knows really and truly that God has form and that He is formless as well. He has many other aspects that cannot be described.'

How can people claim that God cannot be with form? Does one feel a formless object? If there is no such feeling, then how can they claim that God is kind? From the viewpoint of a Vedāntist we cannot know whether God possesses such attributes as kindness or not. He is beyond all attributes, so He cannot be qualified as being 'kind'. Fallacies are inbuilt in our

language and thoughts. How can the Formless One possess attributes? How is it possible to conceive of One who is Formless as having attributes? Is it ever possible for a man to determine God's real nature with his finite intellect?

The Master did not describe God's nature in this way. He practised spiritual disciplines through different paths, and having reached perfection in each, arrived at this supreme realization: 'With sincerity and earnestness one can realize God through all religions.' God can be attained through all paths. He gave the example of a chameleon. Only he who lives under the tree knows the chameleon's true colour, having seen it in different ways. It has different colours, and again sometimes has no colour—it is attributeless. The Master also gave the example of a blind man describing an elephant. The blind man perceives through touch and accepts whichever part he touches as true. Indeed, all the aspects are true, but only partially. If we lay stress on the word 'partially' then all our bickering will come to an end.

It is true that God comes as an Avatāra assuming a human form. It is equally true that out of His grace He appears in various forms before the devotees. Again, He is Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. He is both with and without attributes. In the ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, intense cold freezes the water at places into ice, which floats on the ocean in blocks of various forms. Thus, it becomes possible to see the forms of the formless Brahman. However, when the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts and becomes water as before. In the ocean of Brahman, God assumes forms owing to the cooling effect of the devotion of devotees. Again, for the jñānīs He remains as absolute Brahman. But for certain devotees God assumes eternal forms. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: 'There are places in the ocean where the ice doesn't melt at all.'

Kedar said that in the *Bhāgavata*, Vyāsadeva asked for God's forgiveness for his three transgressions: 'O Lord, Thou art Formless, but I have thought of Thee in my meditation as

endowed with form. Thou art beyond speech, but I have sung Thee hymns. Thou art the All-pervading Spirit, but I have made pilgrimages to sacred places.' He begged for forgiveness for all these transgressions.

The Master added: 'Yes, God has form and He is formless too. Further, He is beyond both form and formlessness. No one can limit Him.' Where there is no form or formlessness, the mind and speech are silent. But a sādhaḥa describes Him who is beyond mind and speech in words for his own sake. Remembering that he is still imperfect, a sādhaḥa should meditate on God, who is Infinite, Endless, and beyond thought, in all humility. One who meditates this way never errs.

CHAPTER 24

The Gospel (March 11, 1883)

Rakhal's father had come to meet Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was praising him: 'Ah, what a sweet nature Rakhal has nowadays! And why shouldn't it be so? If the yam is a good one, its shoots also become good.'

M. and Girindra were discussing the 'eternal form of God'. The eternal form of God is one of the most cherished ideals of the devotees of God. God assumes an eternal form for the sake of His devotees. It is the ultimate stage, so far as they are concerned, and it is not necessary for them to transcend this stage to reach the formless aspect. Each person will reach the goal of final beatitude according to his or her individual taste and capacity.

King Janaka and Karma

M. beautifully narrated the entire day's events. In the afternoon of that day, the devotees were singing in the Panchavati. The Master joined them in singing and dancing. After the singing was over the Master came back to his room and sat, with the devotees sitting all around him. Addressing the householder devotees, the Master said: 'But it is a great deal to his credit if a householder utters the name of the Lord. Think of King Janaka. What courage he had, indeed!... He possessed the perfect knowledge of Brahman and also was devoted to the duties of the world.' King Janaka is often mentioned as a glowing example of how to live in the world

with detachment. It is said in the Purānas that King Janaka was so established in the knowledge of Brahman that Śukadeva was sent to him to be taught this supreme knowledge. He is also mentioned in the *Gītā*. He fenced with two swords, as it were—the one of Knowledge and the other of work. A question is sometimes raised whether he was a spiritual aspirant or a liberated soul. As a spiritual aspirant he also lived in the world and engaged himself in work. And though he was a liberated soul who had attained the perfect knowledge of Brahman, he performed his royal duties. His actions did not contradict his knowledge. Though in the midst of actions, he was completely detached. Once he said: 'Even if Mithilā is ravaged by fire, nothing of mine will be burnt.' He was free from the idea that Mithilā [his capital] was his own. The sense of 'I and mine' breeds ignorance. The Self within is not involved in the actions of the body. Can a jñānī then act in whatever way he desires? One who is steadfast in knowledge, knows that he does not do anything. He (the Self within) does not kill anybody even if he (the body) kills scores of people. From the pragmatic standpoint the theory is indeed dangerous. For this reason the Master assured us that the iron sword would be turned to gold by the touch of the 'philosopher's stone' and that no act of violence would then be possible by that sword. In the same way, a jñānī never performs any evil deed. In order to extol jñāna, the scriptures claim that its sanctity is such that it is never possible for a jñānī to perform any evil deed.

The Master then said: 'The constant company of holy men is necessary. The holy man introduces one to God.' Soon after, the devotees took leave of him.

Performance of Action by a Jñānī and a Bhakta

A Brāhmo devotee named Manilal Mallik came to the Master and saluted him. He was a businessman and had a business at Vārānasī. He had just been there. When the Master

asked if he had met any holy men at Vārānasī, Manilal spoke about his meeting with Trailanga Swami, Bhaskarananda, and others. Referring to Trailanga Swami, he said, 'Now he has lost much of his power.' But the Master said that it was a mere criticism of worldly people. Worldly people tend to judge a saint with regard to his supernatural powers. If a saint possesses such powers, worldly people will try to get something from him. A saint should not be judged by supernatural powers but by the intensity of his love for God and his renunciation. The Master asked about the discussions Manilal had with Bhaskarananda. Hearing that Bhaskarananda had advised him to give up sinful thoughts, the Master said, 'Yes, that is also a path meant for worldly-minded people.' Those who are yet to develop love for God are called 'worldly-minded people'. We must discriminate between good and evil at the initial stage. But a real bhakta or jñānī does not do so. When a bhakta is immersed in the thought of God, he is naturally incapable of performing any evil deed. In the same way, a jñānī also cannot perform any evil deed. They do not have to reason in order to shun evil. The devotee is so full of love of God that whatever action he does is good. Good impressions have driven away his latent evil impressions and only the former are operative now. But so long as we have both good and evil impressions within us, the conflict between good and evil will persist. In that state we shall have to consciously refrain from evil deeds. But those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened, who have developed a genuine love for God, who have realized that God alone is the doer, cherish a different ideal. Ordinary people should constantly discriminate between good and evil. Only fully awakened souls are beyond virtue and vice.

We should be aware of such a lofty spiritual state. Otherwise, we shall settle down comfortably at the state where we are now. We should know that we have to move ahead. Is there any end to sādhanā? As we go on in our sādhanā, perhaps a couple of tears fall from our eyes, or we

feel a sudden sense of joy within, and then we begin to think that we have become highly spiritual! We should bear in mind that we have progressed very little, and a long, long path lies ahead of us. The path of sādhanā is not strewn with rose petals. A fleeting sensation of joy will not do. We should be completely immersed in the Divine. So long as we do not experience such a feeling, we should understand that the entire path remains to be covered. Many people say: 'Earlier we used to get joy in repeating God's name. Nowadays we don't experience that at all.' But we should ask ourselves: 'Are we really feeling intense pain within us to see God?' We need to prepare ourselves for our Godward journey by avoiding evil and taking refuge in good alone. In this way, when the sinful impressions are totally eliminated, we can dispense with good as well. We must reach the state which is beyond ignorance and knowledge. Only when we are free from egoism will such a realization dawn on us. After God-realization, one automatically feels that it is He who does everything. Before that if we say, 'He is doing everything', we are simply deceiving ourselves. When we do anything wrong, commit any bad deed, we tend to say in our defence: 'What to do? God has caused us to do this.'

Sincerity and Chanting God's Name

The Master asked Manilal if he had any other discussion with Bhaskarananda. Manilal said: 'I asked him how to cultivate bhakti. He said: "Chant the name of God. Repeat the name of Rāma."' The Master said, 'That is very good.' By repeating God's name one develops love for Him. Repeating God's name gradually purifies the mind and then love for God grows. Vaidhī bhakti slowly grows into supreme devotion. Thus, love generates love. Vaidhī bhakti should be practised on with steadfast devotion and not for show. Love for God does not come in a day; it comes slowly over time as one progresses on the path of sādhanā. We think that by repeating God's

name a few times we shall be overwhelmed with divine bliss. It does not happen that way. It also does not happen if we merely sit quiet, without doing anything, hoping that by His grace our heart will be filled with love for God. He knows what He will do or will not do. We should, on our part, take care of what we are supposed to do. The Master disregarded rituals and other such practices which are mostly for show, as not being part of true religion. Until a sādhaḥa feels a strong desire to attain God, spiritual life has not begun. What we normally consider to be religion—such as japa, worship, and recitation of scriptures—is like a child playing with dolls, according to Tulsidās. A small girl plays with her dolls, but when she is married she no longer plays with them. In the same way, all these—japa, worship etc.—are like playing with toys. When one feels sincere longing for God within, then true spiritual life begins.

A few elderly Brāhma devotees arrived from Calcutta that day, including Thakurdas Sen. Sitting on his small cot the Master talked with the devotees in a joyful mood. The discussion centred around love. The Master said to them: 'You talk glibly about prema. But is it such a commonplace thing? Sri Chaitanya had this ecstatic love.' Ordinary sādhaḥas do not experience mahābhāva (the most intense form of love of God) or prema. Ordinary sādhaḥas may at best have bhāva, but not mahābhāva. There are two characteristics of prema. First, it makes one forget the world. So intense is one's love of God that one becomes unconscious of external things. Second, one loses all sense of body-consciousness. The feeling that 'I am the body' is completely eradicated. Ordinary people can develop some love for God, but to be able to forget the body, which is so dear to us, is not so easy. This is why the Master said that without God-realization, one does not experience prema. But one may have some ecstatic experiences before through the practice of sādhanā. There are certain signs of God-realization. A person who is close to God manifests sāttvic qualities, such as compassion for living beings, love of association with holy

people and serving them, chanting the name and glories of God, truthfulness, and so on. These are manifestations of divine love. Love does not mean that we simply shed tears. When such signs are visible in an aspirant, then it may be understood that for him the vision of God is not far off.

One of the devotees asked: 'Sir, should one first practise discrimination to attain self-control?' The Master did not disregard the path of discrimination, but neither did he assign it a superior position. He said: 'But the inner organs are brought under control naturally through the path of devotion. It is rather easily accomplished that way.' Sense pleasures appear more and more tasteless as love for God grows. If one has tasted syrup made from sugar candy, can one relish a drink made from treacle? The Master clarified the point by giving this example: 'Can carnal pleasure attract a grief-stricken man and woman the day their child has died?' The sorrow is too deep to allow the mind to be diverted to other things. A devotee asked, 'How can I take delight in God's name?' Quite true. Where is our love for God? If we develop love for Him then the attraction for sense pleasures will disappear—this is quite true. But why do we not develop love for Him? The Master replied: 'Pray to God with a yearning heart that you may take delight in His name. He will certainly fulfil your heart's desire.' This sounds too simple to be believed. Is it really true that if we only pray we shall develop a taste for His name? The Master said, 'Then if, through the chanting of the name, one's attachment to God grows day by day, and joy fills the soul, one has nothing to fear.' God has an endless number of names. One should go on repeating any of His names that one likes. If one has even a little desire for this, there is hope for him. God's grace will descend on him.

God sees our heart. Therefore, we should keep on repeating His name with all sincerity. While giving initiation the teacher of the Kartābhajā sect says: 'Now everything depends on your mind.' That is to say, if one sincerely repeats the name he is sure to succeed. 'He who has the right mind

finds the right way and also achieves the right end.' One should practise sādhanā with implicit faith in the glory of God's name. One should have burning faith: 'What! I am repeating His holy name. Is there anything impossible for me?'

So long as the ego remains we cannot realize God. If we place ourselves in the position of the 'doer', then where do we accommodate God? 'By being lowly one can rise high.' Without humility, we can't acquire love for God. It is imperative to have the company of holy people. 'One must take the trouble to seek the company of holy persons.' It is necessary to take the trouble because at the beginning the mind may not feel drawn towards God. It has to be forcibly placed over there. Maybe the situation at home is not conducive to spiritual life, so one has to force the mind to have holy company.

The Master then alluded: 'One sign of the nobleman's mansion is that all the rooms are lighted. The poor cannot afford much oil, and consequently cannot have so many lights. This shrine of the body should not be left dark; one should illumine it with the lamp of Wisdom.' Everyone has the right to attain Him. By surrendering to Him one may be united with Him who is the source of all energy. That Supreme Soul exists within everybody, but we have separated ourselves from Him. That is why we think we are small and have finite powers. As soon as we are united with Him, we attain the very essence of Consciousness. One whose consciousness has been awakened does not enjoy hearing or talking about anything but God. The *chātaka* bird does not drink anything but rain water.

CHAPTER 25

The Gospel (April 8, 1883)

After three songs were sung one after another by Ramlal and a brahmin official of the temple, Sri Ramakrishna spoke about the ways to attain God: 'As the tiger devours other animals, so does the "tiger of zeal for the Lord" eat up lust, anger, and the other passions. Once this zeal grows in the heart, lust and the other passions disappear. The gopīs of Vrindāvan had that state of mind because of their zeal for Krishna.' In order to explain the nature of that zeal, the Master said, 'Again, this zeal for God is compared to collyrium.' The scriptures say emphatically that the intensity of the zeal makes one see God. Rādhā said to her friends, 'I see Krishna everywhere.' Bound souls do not think of God even for a moment. No noble deed can ever be done by these worldly people, controlled as they are by lust, anger, and other passions. Bound souls are like silkworms, which do not like to come out of the cocoons they have woven out of their own saliva. But why does someone invite his own death, binding himself like that? The Master replied, 'It is māyā that deludes.'

There are many classes of people. Some attain perfection through spiritual practice. They are like farmers who irrigate their field with great labour. Then again, some are there who attain perfection through the grace of God. They are like farmers who do not have to take the trouble of drawing water. Their fields are watered by rain. By God's grace they easily attain perfection. But they are indeed very few. Now the question automatically arises: Why do we have to practise

spiritual discipline? Why doesn't He make all of us perfect through His grace? God alone knows what He will do. We are only to be concerned with what we should do and begin our sādhanā in order to earn His grace. If we really want perfection, we have to do all that is necessary to attain it. Then if He graciously desires to free us without our having to undergo spiritual sādhanā, it is His prerogative.

Then there is yet another class—the ever-perfect. They are born in each life with their spiritual consciousness awakened. They have already done what they had to do. They are filled with knowledge and devotion. They wait for the right moment, and when it comes their knowledge and devotion fully blossom. They accompany an Avatāra when he descends.

The Earnestness of the Gopīs

The Master said: 'What zeal the gopīs had! How intensely they longed for Krishna!' While hearing the song on the earnestness of the gopīs of Vrindāvan, the Master passed into samādhi. In his ecstasy he saw Krishna everywhere. The eager eyes of the devotees were fixed on the Master of infinite moods.

After coming down from samādhi the Master once again began speaking. Meanwhile Adhar Sen arrived with several of his friends. The Master was answering a question that arose in his own mind: 'The spiritual wisdom of worldly people is seen only on rare occasions. It is like the flame of a candle.' Then he immediately retracted that, saying: 'No, it is rather like a single ray of the sun passing through a chink in a wall. Worldly people chant the name of God, but there is no zeal behind it.' Worldly people repeat God's name without any feeling. They have no idea or any experience of God. There is no zeal in their sādhanā nor have they any grit. People reap the fruits of their own past actions. The Master sang a song conveying the idea:

O Mother, I have no one else to blame;
 Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.

'I' and 'Mine' and the Fear of Death

The Master said later, "'I' and 'Mine'—that is ignorance.' This feeling of 'I and mine' is the root cause of all our suffering. In reality, if this fence of 'I' around us is pulled down, we shall no longer find the 'I' within us. Only He remains. He exists behind this impermanent body. By discriminating we will come to realize the truth. Are we the body or the mind or something else? No, we are none of this. We have no attributes whatsoever.

Attributes are distinctive features by which we separate ourselves from Him. The attributes of the body, mind, and sense organs are superimposed on the Self. Maybe I am fat or thin. This fatness or thinness is an attribute of my body, which is superimposed on the Self, but I say that 'I', or the Soul, is fat or thin, etc. In the same way, the sense organs and the mind are superimposed on the Self. But none of these attributes belongs to the Soul. It is beyond righteousness and unrighteousness. It is not tainted by any quality.

Reasoning stops when one sees God. Reasoning has no place there. How can any doubt arise where there is direct realization? The Master said, 'But there are instances of people who have realized God and who still continue to reason.' Even after realization, some people continue to reason for the sake of others; to bring their own realizations within others' reach and to help them realize the Supreme Truth through reasoning. Śankarācārya and others continued to reason to enable others to attain that Supreme Self. Again, there are people who, even after having seen God, repeat His name and sing His glories to enjoy the bliss of devotion. If the realizations of holy people were not manifest in this way, then ordinary people would be left with no way to know Him. If the bliss within is not revealed, then people cannot even imagine it.

The Master said: 'It is God alone who has become everything. But in man He manifests Himself the most.' Consciousness is very clearly manifest in us. And God is directly manifest in a person who has a pure heart. That is why Sri Krishna said that a jñānī is His very self.

Adhar Sen came with his friend Saradacharan and informed the Master of his friend's grief at the loss of his son. The Master sang, as if unmindful of his surroundings:

To arms! To arms, O man!

Death storms your house in battle array!

This life is a battlefield in which death has entered as a warrior. He has to be fought out. Death is inevitable, but as we are unmindful of it while we live, we have no strength to stand up and fight it when it comes. We have to become strong with the help of knowledge and devotion, and transcend death by realizing our true Self. There is no other way. Death has entered the house, and we have to fight it with the weapon called God's holy name. Though the Master first spoke about fighting, he then said: 'O Lord, I do as Thou doest through me. I speak as Thou speakest through me.... Give your power of attorney to God.'

We do not have to fight if we surrender totally to the will of God. So long as the 'I' is there, the fight goes on. The Master not only gave advice to the man who was grief-stricken by his son's death, but his heart was also touched by his grief. He said, 'But isn't your grief for your son only natural?' He had great sympathy. The sorrows of ordinary people touched him. What can a human being do then? Will he sink in despair? That is why the Master added: 'But house, wife, and children are all transitory; they have only a momentary existence.' If we become awakened to the sense of the transitoriness of this world then there cannot be any grief. The word jagat (world) means that which moves or is transitory. Why should we grieve for something that is inevitable?

God is engaged in three kinds of activities: creation, preservation, and destruction. Death is inevitable. At the time of dissolution, the Divine Mother gathers up only the seeds for the future creation. Our little world is all we know, so we feel unsettled if we lose anything of it. Nothing will remain in this entire universe. It is like a bubble—its span of life is momentary. A bubble comes up from the water, stays for a moment, and then dissolves back into the water. This world also, like a bubble, rises, remains for a few days in the infinite expanse of time, and then again dissolves back into that. We, ordinary mortals, can hardly conceive of it. Human beings float in an eternal current of time. Sometimes a few bubbles form a cluster, only to be separated and washed away, who knows where. We are floating like straws, yet we dream pleasant dreams! We try to forget our grief by fond hopes that even though separated we shall eventually be reunited. But that is not the way. The way lies in recognizing the impermanent as impermanent, and thus training the mind to accept the inevitable. If we can totally give up our desires, efface the sense of 'I' and pull down the barriers of our little world, then all our sorrows will come to an end. 'The impermanent world will remain impermanent, and I will not gain or lose anything.' If we can only be firm in this conviction and be settled in it, then we have nothing to fear. We conquer death and attain the state that is eternal, invincible, and deathless. When we know that we are immortal, death can no longer have any sway over us. 'By knowing Him one goes beyond death, there is no other path to go by.'¹

Instructions to Adhar Sen

Sri Ramakrishna then began to talk with Adhar on the verandah north of his room. Adhar had met the Master only recently. This was his second visit. He died a year and a half later. The Master advised him as if he knew his future: 'This world is our field of activity. We are born here to perform certain duties. People have their homes in the country but come

to Calcutta for work. It is necessary to do a certain amount of work. This is a kind of discipline. But one must finish it speedily.'

Adhar Sen was a Deputy Magistrate, so the Master wanted to remind him that he had obtained his position through the grace of God. Having acquired fame and prestige, he should not forget God. So the Master said, 'We stay in the world only a couple of days.' It appears that the Master was specially trying to impress on Adhar's mind the transient nature of the world. We should always keep in mind that we have not come to this world to live permanently. We have been born as humans in order to realize God. If the purpose for which we have come is not achieved, then our human birth becomes useless. It is no use postponing things with the idea, 'I shall do them later', or 'That will come in due course'. We have to practise spiritual discipline. We should work hard, keeping in mind that the purpose of this life is God-realization. While melting gold the goldsmith uses everything—the bellow, the fan, and the pipe—so that the fire may be hot enough to melt the metal. Until then he does not get even the chance to enjoy a smoke. In the same way, we first have to attain God. The Master said in another context: 'Gold is kept in a room with only a wall between it and a thief. Will the thief remain quiet, or will he try his utmost to reach the gold and carry it away by breaking the wall?' When we have a human birth and the chance to think of Him, we should make optimum use of it as soon as possible. We should feel restless and a strong urge to attain the goal. Otherwise, becoming lazy, if we think we need not hurry, the goal will remain unattained. The Master said: 'One must have stern determination; then alone is spiritual practice possible. One must make a firm resolve.'

There are so many temptations in the world. That is why one should have strong determination and remain always on guard. There is great power in the name of God and it destroys ignorance. But those who have renounced the world do not have much to fear. They are away from the objects of sense enjoyments. But merely staying away from the objects of sense

enjoyments will not do. The Master said: 'The real sannyāsi lives away from "woman and gold". Therefore, through the practice of spiritual discipline he can always fix his mind on God.' We should take note of the words 'through the practice of spiritual discipline'. Often it is seen that a person does not lead a very sensuous life, but his life runs along rather monotonously and without any purpose. Therefore, whatever renunciation he practises becomes futile. It is absolutely necessary to practise spiritual discipline. Renunciation alone cannot lead us to perfection. Renunciation is the means and not the end. With it's help one should fix one's mind on God. There is no justification for such renunciation that does not help one on the journey Godward. Renunciation should be accompanied by sādhanā. One should watch whether one's love for God increases or not; otherwise, renunciation alone is useless.

Love of God

The Master described renunciation as dispassion for sense objects and love for God. One may develop dispassion for sense objects for many reasons. We may avoid them because we have been hurt in our pursuit of them, or the objects of sense enjoyment may remain beyond our reach. But that does not give rise to love for God. True renunciation does not come about without love for God. The Master alluded to pseudo-renunciation on many occasions. Superficially it may look like renunciation, but actually it is not. It is like a person who went to Vārānasī in a fit of renunciation and finally found a job there. When he got a job, his renunciation also disappeared. This is a kind of pseudo-renunciation. One who is truly filled with dispassion never develops any attachment for sense objects. But those who live in the world, in the midst of 'woman and gold', may direct their attention to God; but sometimes their mind turns to 'woman and gold'. At times they fix their mind on God, but their mind turns back to sense-

objects. The minds of ordinary people are like common flies, which alight on a piece of candy, then on a sore or filth. But a bee only sits on flowers and draws honey. Similarly, the mind of a person of true renunciation always dwells in God. It is necessary to fix the mind on God; and for this one must strive hard with strong determination in the initial stages of *sādhana*. The mind is naturally drawn towards sense pleasures, so it is necessary to keep it away from sense objects.

In the Tantra there are provisions for three kinds of *sādhana*—*paśubhāva* (the animal mood), *vīrabhāva* (the heroic mood) and *devabhāva* (the divine mood). *Paśu*, as the word implies, does not mean a cow or a cat. It means one who is a slave to the sense organs. An ordinary *jīva* follows the *paśubhāva* Tāntric discipline. Such people should stay away from objects of temptation. Otherwise, they never know when their mind will be drawn towards them. It is indeed very difficult to fight against one's natural tendencies. Sometimes they may succeed and sometimes they may fail. So they are advised to stay away from them altogether. But an aspirant following the *vīrabhāva* does not withdraw himself from sense objects. He fights them. That is why he is called a *vīra* (hero). A hero lives in the midst of temptations, but he fights without being tempted and is fully confident of his strength. He progresses, fighting all the way. An aspirant of *devabhāva*, on the other hand, because of his divine qualities, always fixes his mind on God whether he lives in the midst of temptations or not. Such *sādhakas* are never attracted to sense objects. But the divine mode of *sādhana* is not possible for ordinary aspirants. Rarely indeed does one come across such a *sādhaka*. His mind is not attracted by the pleasures one gets from the enjoyment of sense objects or the joy one derives from the sense organs. *Sādhakas* following *vīrabhāva* are few and far between. In the Tantra, the primary path recommended is *paśubhāva*, as it suits ordinary *sādhakas*. We should be careful not to follow the *vīrabhāva*, overestimating our strength. If we follow that path, it is very likely we may fall.

REFERENCE

1. *Tameva viditvā'timrityumeti nānyah panthā vidyate'yanāya.*
— *Svetāśvatara Upanishad, 3.8*

CHAPTER 26

The Gospel (April 15, 1883)

Surendra was one of the beloved lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He had invited the Master to his house on the auspicious occasion of the Annapurnā Pujā. The Master sat on a carpet in the open courtyard of Surendra's house. He was offered a bolster, but he pushed it aside. He said: 'To lean against a bolster!* You see, it is very difficult to give up vanity. You may discriminate, saying that the ego is nothing at all; but still it comes, nobody knows from where.' That is to say, to sit leaning on a bolster in the midst of a gathering of people is like making an announcement, so to say, that one does not belong to the common run. If no bolster is provided, one may think: 'What! I am not even offered a bolster?' Egotism never goes easily. Through discrimination we may push it away, but nobody knows how it creeps in again. The Master gave an illustration: 'A goat's legs jerk for a few moments even after its head has been cut off. Or perhaps you are frightened in a dream; you shake off sleep and become wide awake, but still you feel your heart palpitating. Egotism is exactly like that. You may drive it away, but still it appears from somewhere. Then you look sullen and say: "What! I have not been shown proper respect!" As regards himself the Master said, 'I consider myself as a speck of dust on the devotee's feet'—a state in which the ego is completely absent.

*Rich and aristocratic persons seeking comfort generally sit in this fashion.

Vaidyanath, a pleader at the High Court of Calcutta, arrived. He was introduced to the Master by Surendra. He came because he wanted to ask one or two questions to the Master. But before he asked anything, the Master himself spoke: 'All that you see is the manifestation of God's power.... But you must remember that there is not an equal manifestation of God's power in all things.... God exists in all beings as the all-pervasive power; but the manifestations of His power are different in different beings.' His power does everything, but this power is not the same everywhere. There are variations in its manifestation. He abides in everything as the Lord—that is, He manifests Himself in various forms. Thus all are equal in that sense. But the manifestation of power is different in different beings: some have greater power, some have less.

Free Will

Vaidyanath asked: 'Sir, I have a doubt. People speak of free will. They say that a man can either do good or evil according to his will. Is it true? Are we really free to do whatever we like?' This question very often agitates the minds of the educated people of today. Some say, 'Everything happens according to God's will.' But others say: 'We are free to do whatever we want.' Which is correct? The scriptures say, 'Perform virtuous deeds.' The question arises: Let us first decide if we are really free to do good deeds or not. Those who follow the scriptures say that since the scriptures tell us to perform virtuous deeds, it necessarily follows that we can perform virtuous deeds if we so desire. No one tells a tree, 'Speak the truth.' Nor would we tell a stone, 'Go on a pilgrimage.' Such instructions are not at all relevant where there is no capacity to follow them. So we see that human beings are potentially capable of doing things. As an individual, you may or may not do something, or you may do it in a different way.

It is disturbing to us that we cannot resolve with our intellect whether we are independent or not. One person says, 'Raising my hand or putting it down is fully regulated by my volition.' Another says: 'It was destined that you would raise your hand and put it down, and you have done so. You say that you are doing it of your own volition because you do not have true insight.' The Master was referring to that insight: 'As long as a man has not realized God, he thinks he is free. It is God Himself who keeps this error in man.' We think we are free to act because we have not realized Him, and we do not know that everything is done according to His will. Because we do not see Him as the 'Doer' behind all our actions, we consider ourselves as the 'doers'. The question naturally arises that if we are not free, and if everything depends on the will of God, then why should we reap the fruits of our deeds, good or bad? They should go to Him. The Master said: 'It is God Himself who keeps this error in man. Otherwise sin would have multiplied. Man would not have been afraid of sin.' This sense of 'free will' is kept in us by God; otherwise sinful actions would have increased. If we did not have the feeling that we would have to suffer for our actions, then we would do whatever came to our mind. This would increase sin. When we realize God, then we feel: 'I am the machine, and Thou, O Lord, art the operator.' We have to understand that we have no 'free will' at all!

The Master said to Vaidyanath, 'It is not good to argue.' Vaidyanath agreed, saying, 'Yes, sir. The desire to argue disappears when a man attains wisdom.' Arguing with the intention of forcing one's idea on others is wrong—that was what the Master meant when he said not to argue. He certainly did not mean that we should not reason and discriminate to attain the Truth.

About God-realization, the Master said that the company of holy men was necessary. Sometimes people say, 'If this man has really seen God, then let him show God to me.' But can we learn to feel a person's pulse in one day? So the Master said

that in order to realize the Truth one must have the company of those who have dedicated their whole lives for the sake of Truth, and follow their path. We should not approach holy persons with the intention of arguing; rather, we should follow the path shown by them with enthusiasm and deep reverence.

CHAPTER 27

The Gospel (April 15, 1883)

It was the auspicious occasion of the Annapurnā Pujā. Kīrtan was about to begin at Surendra's house. The drummer began playing on his instrument, and the kīrtan then started with Gaurchandrikā. In the *Padāvalī* literature of the Vaishnavas dealing with the Rādhā-Krishna sport at Vrindāvan, the particular expression is significant. Any singing of kīrtan should begin by eulogising Sri Chaitanya, and it is customary to start with a song about him. This eulogistic song, called Gaurchandrikā, has thus come to mean 'an introduction'. Why is the kīrtan started by praising Sri Chaitanya? In order to know God one should approach Him through an Avatāra. Understanding Sri Krishna (as the supreme Lord) is easier if one sees Him through Sri Gouranga (Chaitanya). It is only through a human medium that contemplation on the divine aspect is possible. One should approach the divine sport through the human sport.

A kīrtan is a recital dealing with a particular phase of the divine sport of Sri Krishna and usually it begins with the Gourchandrikā and ends with songs describing the union of Rādhā with Sri Krishna. Most of the serious Vaishnava sādhakas listen only to songs of separation and not of union. Listening to songs of separation is part of their sādhanā, as they intend to intensify their yearning for God through this.

Here the kīrtan ended in the traditional way with the union of Rādhā and Sri Krishna. As the music came to a close, the Master said, 'Bhāgavata-Bhakta-Bhagavān,' and bowed low

to the devotees seated on all sides. Since God's names had been sung at that place it had become holy.

Worshipping the Formless Reality

It was about half past nine in the evening, and the Master was about to leave for Dakshineswar. Surendra, who was a devotee of the Divine Mother, said rather regretfully to the Master, 'No one has sung anything about the Divine Mother today.' In order to console Surendra, the Master said: 'Ah! Look at the beauty of the hall. The light of the Divine Mother seems to have lighted the whole place. Such a sight fills the heart with joy.' But don't the worshippers of the formless aspect of God experience any joy? It is not so. The Master added: "But not if one has the slightest trace of worldliness. The rishis of olden times renounced everything and then contemplated Satchidānanda, the Indivisible Brahman.' The Master then spoke about those who contemplated on the formless Reality but were not fully immersed in that thought: 'The Brahmajñānis of modern times [a reference to the members of the Brāhmo Samāj] sing of God as being "Immutable and homogenous". It seems dry to me.' Without realizing God, to try and describe Him, who is beyond words, in words makes no sense. 'But those who always cry after the formless Reality do not get anything. They realize nothing either inside or outside.' Saying this, the Master sang a couple of songs to the Divine Mother:

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss!

And again:

Repeat, O mind, my Mother Durgā's hallowed name!

After singing, the Master saluted the image. As he went down the steps, he called softly to Rakhal: 'Where are my shoes? Are they missing?' In samādhi the Master would forget

even his body. But he was never unmindful about anything while he was in the relative plane. Rather, he would even be annoyed if anyone was forgetful. One who is unmindful in one area is also unmindful in others. We are careless because we have no control over our mind. Therefore, Sri Ramakrishna wanted people to live disciplined lives in this world. If our worldly life is unmanageable, so too is our spiritual life. But one who is orderly in his worldly affairs will also think of God in an orderly manner. The Master wanted us to train our mind in this way. The uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna was that though he would completely lose himself in samādhi, he would be completely alert when he was on the relative plane.

CHAPTER 28

The Gospel (June 2, 1883)

Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Balaram's house. From there he went to Adhar's house, and next he went to Ramchandra Datta's house. To entertain the Master, Ramchandra had made arrangements for a recitation from the *Bhāgavata*. The kathak (one who recites from the scriptures) was reciting the story of King Harishchandra. Hearing the tragic tale of Harishchandra, the eyes of the devotees were filled with tears, and some of them were lamenting loudly. A sad story quickly acts on the minds of listeners. But what was the Master doing? He was listening to the recital with rapt attention. Teardrops appeared in his eyes and he wiped them away. Why didn't he behave like the others by becoming restless and lamenting loudly? One who has acquired supreme Knowledge is sober, calm, and remains unaffected in the face of sorrows. But it is not that Sri Ramakrishna was not sympathetic to people when they were in grief. In whatever state he was in, at that time he manifested all the characteristics of that state in his attitude and behaviour.

Uddhava and Premā Bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna then asked the kathak to recite something from 'Uddhava's Mission', perhaps to have a little change from the sad mood of the Harishchandra's story.

Every poem or story has a particular mood that stirs our mind. In 'Uddhava's Mission' the gopis tell Uddhava about

their life with Krishna at Vrindāvan. Uddhava sees the intense longing of the gopīs for Sri Krishna. So he says: 'Why do you feel so restless for Krishna? He exists in all beings.' The gopīs reply, 'We only know the Krishna who sported with us at Vrindāvan.' Uddhava is a jñānī, so he explains to the gopīs that they will be liberated if they meditate on Sri Krishna, knowing Him to be God Himself. But the gopīs are filled with premābhakti (selfless love), so they say: 'Liberation? We do not know what that is. We only want the Krishna of our hearts.' Being a jñānī Uddhava fails to understand the intense longing of the gopīs for Sri Krishna. The Lord is attainable through meditation. By meditating on Him one is able to cross the ocean of the world and be immersed in supreme bliss forever. But Uddhava does not understand that the gopīs do not care for liberation. The gopīs shun liberation, which is desired so much by sādhakas. Liberation is insignificant to them, and they reject it even when it is offered. It is stated in the *Bhāgavata*: 'Such devotees do not accept, even when offered, any of the five forms of liberation—Sālokya (living in My sphere), Sārśhti (having My powers), Sāmīpya (living close to Me), Sārūpya (having a form similar to Mine), and Sāyujya (being one with Me). The only thing they want is the opportunity to render loving service to me.'¹

A real devotee does not want any of the different kinds of liberation, even when it is offered. But he might accept it only if it gives him a chance to serve God. That is to say, liberation is not his goal, but a means which may give him the scope to live near God and serve Him. By attaining liberation, a jñānī merges with God, and no separation remains. But a bhakta does not want that kind of liberation. In this mood the Master sang:

Though I am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed to grant pure love.

The Master said to the kathak, 'The gopīs had ecstatic love, unswerving and single-minded devotion to one ideal.'

Devotion that is mixed with knowledge is not single-minded devotion. What is the nature of this devotion? It makes one feel that it is He who has become everything—Rāma, Krishna, and Śiva. But this element of knowledge is absent in ecstatic love of God. The Master cited the example of Hanumān. Once when Hanumān came to Dwārakā, he wanted Sri Krishna to give him an audience in the form of Sri Rāma. The Master also gave the example of Vibhīshana. On the occasion of the Rājasuya sacrifice all the kings bowed down to Yudhishtira, but Vibhīshana would not. He said, 'I bow down to Nārāyaṇa and to none else.' At these words Lord Krishna himself bowed down to Yudhishtira. Only then did Vibhīshana bow down. The Master gave yet another example. Devotion to one ideal is like the attitude of the daughter-in-law in the family. She serves all the members of the family, but has a special relationship with her husband. The gopīs had this kind of single-minded devotion.

The Master then described two characteristics of premā-bhakti: 'I-ness' and 'my-ness'. 'I-ness' is the feeling: 'I will look after Him and serve Him. If I do not look after Him, who else will? He may fall sick.' Yaśodā had that kind of attitude. Rādhā also had it. When Sri Krishna would go to Chandrāvalī, Rādhā would worry that He would be in difficulty, as Chandrāvalī did not know how to serve Him. 'My-ness' is the feeling that 'He is mine', such as 'my Gopāla'. Uddhava went to Yaśodā and said, 'Mother, your Krishna is the Lord of the Universe.' 'Oh!', exclaimed Yaśodā, 'I am not asking you about your Lord of the Universe. I want to know how *my* Gopāla fares.' This 'my Gopāla' is called 'my-ness'. The gopīs, however, had a different attitude; they had single-minded love for Sri Krishna. The Master said: 'The people of Dwārakā worship Sri Krishna, the companion of Arjuna, but reject Rādhā.' Rādhā is not worshipped in the Deccan also. In the *Bhāgavata* there is no reference to Rādhā. In the descriptions of the 'Rāsālīlā' of Sri Krishna with the gopīs, there is mention of a leading gopī. She takes Sri Krishna away from the other gopīs and sports with

him elsewhere. It is she who is imagined to be Rādhā by the Vaishnavas. Why is she called Rādhā? It is stated in the *Bhāgavata*: 'Surely the Lord had been worshipped very devoutly by her.'² She must have worshipped Hari, the Lord. That is why the Lord goes away with her for sport. So the word 'Rādhā' has come from the word 'anayārādhito' in the verse. There is no clear mention of the name 'Rādhā', but it is there in a subtle way. Rādhā is not worshipped everywhere. The conception of 'Rādhā' belongs to Vrindāvan, and the idea found its fulfilment in Sri Chaitanya. In Bengal the conception of 'Rādhā' seems to be very popular, and from Bengal it must have spread to Assam and Orissa.

Which is better—ecstatic love or love mixed with knowledge? The Master said: 'It is not possible to develop ecstatic love of God unless you love Him very deeply and regard Him as your very own.' It is essential that one develops intense love for God and considers Him as one's very own. That love is so deep that He ceases to appear great and glorious. Very deep love makes the object of love appear small. When Sri Krishna was born in the prison, He blessed Vāsudeva and Devakī in His four-handed divine form. Devakī feared that Kamsa might kill the baby, seeing such a form. God appeared in His supreme form, yet Devakī saw Him as her own child. And as a mother, her mind was filled with anxiety and apprehension. It never occurred to her that Kamsa could never kill Him who is all-glorious and all-mighty, whose will controls the entire universe. One whose love is deep feels that way. The gopīs did not like to see God in His Supreme form as the Controller of the universe. They did not want to see God's divine nature. God's splendour never attracts true devotees, nor do they want anything from Him. This is indeed the sign of premābhakti.

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1. *Sālokya-sārshṭi-sāmīpya-sārūpyaikatvamapyuta,
Dīyamānam na gṛhinanti vinā matsevanam janāḥ.*

— *Bhāgavata*, 3.29.13

2. *Anayā'rāddhito nuna bhagavān Harirīśvarah.*

— *Bhāgavata*, 10.30.28

CHAPTER 29

The Gospel (June 4, 1883)

Phalahārini Kālī Pujā

It was the day of the new moon and of the Phalahārini Kālī Pujā. M. was describing the Master's state on that special day. Time and again we come across descriptions in the *Gospel* of Sri Ramakrishna when he was filled with ecstasy on special days and auspicious occasions. That particular day the Master was singing in ecstasy:

Thou art the heavens and the earth,
and Thou the nether world;
From Thee have the twelve Gopālas
and Hari and Brahmā sprung.

The previous night the goddess Kātyāyanī had been worshipped. The gopīs worshipped the goddess Kātyāyanī, praying for her grace so that they might get Sri Krishna as their husband. Devī Kātyāyanī stands for Śakti and by the grace of Śakti one attains God.

On the occasion of the pujā, Trailokya (a descendant of Rani Rasmani) came to the temple garden accompanied by some other people. Sri Ramakrishna was in an ecstatic state, but seeing Trailokya, the Master asked, 'Was there no yātrā (a village theatrical performance) performance last night?' Trailokya replied that the yātrā could not be arranged because of some difficulties. The Master said: 'What is done is done. But please see that this doesn't happen again. The traditions of

the temple should be properly observed.' Rani Rasmani had bequeathed much property (by creating an endowment) for the service of the temple deities. The Master was anxious to see that the Rani's grant was properly utilised. The performance of the yātrā was not important in itself, but the will of the Rani should be respected. That was the idea. The Master was thinking of the family's welfare, so he expressed his anxiety. The Master was careful to see that though Rani Rasmani was no longer alive, the endowment money should be spent according to her desire. In so many ways, the Master thought of her family's welfare.

The Reasons behind the Master's Behaviour and Actions

Very often we cannot understand the Master's behaviour. On the surface his behaviour appears very strange. While discussing and analysing his life, the chronicler of *The Great Master* said that every one of the Master's actions had deep significance. But we can understand this only if he makes us understand it by his grace. Each and every incident in the life of an Avatāra—even his breathing—is for the good of humanity. No action, or even any gesture of the Master was fruitless. It is recorded in *The Great Master* that one day the Master asked Balaram, 'Tell me, why did I marry?' Balaram kept quiet. The Master himself replied: 'It is for this [meaning his body]! Otherwise, who would have cooked so nicely?' Referring to the purpose of his marriage, on another occasion, he said, 'A brahmin body has to perform ten ceremonies in life, and marriage is one of them.' Again he said, 'One who becomes a paramahansa has previously experienced all stages of life, from the sweeper to the kings and emperors.' The chronicler of *The Great Master* mentioned in this context that despite the Master having pointed out the above reasons for his marriage, there were other special reasons too. The Master showed us the ideal life of renunciation. He left for us a lofty and pure ideal of married life. If the Master had not married he would

have been regarded only as a sannyāsī. In that case, only a few persons capable of accepting monastic life could follow his ideal. But what about ordinary people? They would think, 'Well, he did not marry himself, so he can talk so much about continence.' Sri Ramakrishna's advent was not for just a few monks. He came for everyone. He lived in the world without being touched by its worldliness. As he put it: 'Live in the world like a mud-fish. The mud-fish lives in the mud but itself remains unstained.' Such an ideal life, suitable for all, was never seen before.

In the *Bhāgavata* there is a description of Sri Krishna coming back after tending the cattle, and the villagers seeing him according to their own idea—cowherds as their friend, Yaśodā as her Gopāla, and the gopīs as their beloved. This seeing is but a partial vision. His manifestations in human form in different aspects of life have not been properly represented. The Master has shown by his own example that we can continue our spiritual practices under all circumstances and while living in any situation in this world. This ideal has never been shown in such an exemplary way, as has been done by the Master. We should always keep in mind that each of the Master's words has a deep meaning.

The Master said: 'Now and then Hazra comes forward to teach me. He says to me, "Why do you think so much about the youngsters?"... the Divine Mother revealed to me in a flash that it is She Herself who has become man. But She manifests Herself most clearly through a pure soul.' The Master used to be full of joy with these pure boys and he used to feel great yearning to see them. He would feel especially restless to see Narendra. But the Master sometimes wondered why this happened, so he asked Bholanath, an employee of the temple estate, 'Can you tell me why I should feel this way?' Bholanath said: 'You will find the explanation in the *Mahābhārata*. On coming down to the plane of ordinary consciousness, a man established in samādhi likes to be in the company of sāttvic [pure] people.' When the minds of such people come down to

the external world they hold it there by the attraction for the company of pure, sāttvic souls. That is why the Master used to feel deep longing for boys of sāttvic nature.

The Master was reminiscing of his early days and his divine madness. People thought that he had become insane, so his marriage was arranged hoping that he would put his mind on his household and lead a worldly life. We have seen in the biography of the Master that his mind was made of such stuff that it could never be enmeshed in worldliness.

The Master then told the devotees about his days of sādhanā, when even the slightest thing would awaken his spiritual consciousness. The sight of a prostitute instantly enkindled in him the vision of Sitā. Again, seeing an English boy leaning against a tree with his body bent in three places, the vision of Sri Krishna came before him in a flash. Once, while feeding the cowherd boys at Sihore, he saw that those boys were actually the cowherd boys of Vrindāvan. Each of his actions was permeated with divine feeling. Just an ordinary incident or a trifling scene would enkindle the consciousness of the divine. In those days he would be almost unconscious of the outer world. Mathur kept him at his Jānbazār mansion for a few days, and while living there, the ladies of the house did not feel at all shy before him. They used to regard him as one of themselves. And he himself felt as if he was the handmaid of the Divine Mother. He used to be in different spiritual moods at different times. By only seeing him in one particular mood the devotees should not think that he embodied that much alone and nothing else. Unless we keep in mind that Sri Ramakrishna is the embodiment of all gods and goddesses, we cannot see him in his fullness.

So should men imitate the Master's example by living with ladies and associating intimately with them? No, the Master never said so. He always advised men to be careful about women. This word of caution is applicable to both men and women. It is not said to demean or criticize anyone. He has cautioned us so that all of us may remain firm in our ideal and

that we may progress in our spiritual lives. Caution is necessary, as association between men and women causes distraction. We cannot even imagine how pure one's mind should be to be able to live the way the Master did at Mathur's house at Jānbazār. In the Purānas we find that only Śukadeva had such lack of body-consciousness. Seeing Śukadeva even the bathing apsarās (celestial nymphs) did not feel the least disconcerted. As one does not feel ashamed at the sight of a tree or a child, they too did not feel any shame. Similarly, the women devotees of Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the Master always seemed to be one of them.

CHAPTER 30

The Gospel (June 4, 1883)

Hazra, Bhavanath, and Other Devotees

After his noon meal that day the Master took a short rest. He did not have deep sleep. He just dozed. The Master almost never had deep sleep. He would doze off for a while, and that served the purpose of his rest. The Master, still half-asleep, exchanged a word or two with Manilal. Manilal informed the Master that Shivanath admired Nityagopal's spiritual state. The Master then asked what people thought of Hazra. We may wonder why the Master put such an irrelevant question. It is very difficult to judge a person's spiritual development observing his outward behaviour. He who appears to have advanced substantially, may not have advanced at all. Or one whom we do not consider spiritually developed, may have great potential for development. So the Master raised the question about Hazra after talking about Nityagopal. Hazra lived at Dakshineshwar with the Master. He used to perform some japa and meditation, or rather, he made a show of it. Many devotees were impressed by Hazra. But the Master used to make fun of him, saying, 'If one finds the big dargāh here, then Hazra is the smaller dargāh.' That is to say, Hazra is not a man to be trifled with.

Soon after, the Master sat up on his bed and talked about Bhavanath: 'Ah! What an exalted state he is in! He has hardly begun to sing about God before his eyes fill with tears. The very sight of Harish made him ecstatic. He said that Harish

was very lucky. Bhavanath was a householder, but as soon as he began to sing about God his eyes would be wet. As Harish lived with the Master, the very sight of him made him ecstatic. It is very clear that he had great thirst for spiritual life, and the Master appreciated his yearning for God. The Master asked M. about the cause of their devotion and then replied himself: 'The fact is, all men may look alike from the outside, but some of them have fillings of "condensed milk". Cakes may have fillings of condensed milk or powdered black grams, but they all look alike from the outside. The desire to know God, ecstatic love of Him, and other such spiritual qualities are the "condensed milk".' It is not possible to see what is inside a cake from the outside. In the same way, people look alike from the outside, and so we cannot know who has what inside. It was as if referring to the earlier discussion that the Master was asking, when people praise another person, do they see his inner self? It is possible to make a judgement about someone by observing his behaviour, but whether the person is truly as he appears can be judged only by one who is capable of seeing the inner self of a person. One who has this 'condensed milk' within—that is, one who has premābhakti will certainly manifest this love, given favourable conditions. But only a person with divine insight can see that there is love hidden inside even before its manifestation.

Grace and Self-effort

The Master was assuring the devotees: 'Some think: "Oh, I am a bound soul. I shall never acquire knowledge and devotion." But if one receives the guru's grace, one has nothing to fear.' Such apprehensions very often come in our mind. Particularly at the initial stage, when we are just beginning to acquaint ourselves with our mind. We feel that we are bound souls because of our attachment for sense objects. That is why the Master assured us: 'But if one receives the guru's grace, one has nothing to fear.' By the grace of the guru we will find the

path to liberation from the so-called bound state. The guru will uncover the potential for liberation that is already within us and encourage us to proceed towards liberation. The Master gave a story to explain this point about the guru's grace.

Once a tiger cub grew up with a flock of goats. It gradually grew into a big tiger. One day another tiger attacked the flock of goats and was astonished to find a grass-eating tiger there. The wild tiger dragged him away from the flock and showed him his image reflected in a lake and also forced it to eat some meat. The grass-eating tiger then realized: 'I am no longer helpless like a goat. I am a tiger.' The tiger that attacked the flock was the guru to the grass-eating tiger. So there can be no fear if the guru's grace descends on us. By his grace we understand what our true nature is and struggle to unfasten our shackles to realize our true Self. This is called Self-realization.

We are oblivious of our true nature. The guru tells us: 'You are not helpless. You are not bound and gagged by eight kinds of shackles. The supreme Lord is within you. You have to reach Him. You are that supreme Self (Paramātmā), free from all shackles.' Swamiji, while lecturing in the West, often narrated this story of the tiger and the goat to extol the glories of the Ātman.

The guru shows the path and the disciple follows it. But we should not think that the guru will escort the disciple to that goal. We often see that some people gain from the company of holy people while others fail to get anything. It is all right to have the company of holy men, but unless the sādhaṅga makes efforts himself, no benefit will come from such company. There is a common saying: 'The guru, Krishna, and the Vaishnava shower their grace on the jīva, but without the grace of one, the jīva is ruined.' The guru means the one who gives directions, Krishna means God or the supreme goal, and the Vaishṇava means the sādhaṅga. All three are kind to the jīva. In other words, the sādhaṅga may decide to attain God through sādhanā, but one thing does not offer its grace. That is

to say, if the mind is not gracious and makes no effort, then the sādhaḥa cannot attain God.

We often hear people say, 'Without the guru's grace nothing can be achieved.' We do not try to practise anything, but we keep saying that if He wills, it will be done. This is not surrender, but sheer laziness. This is how we deceive our own mind. Even after hearing the guru's instructions if the mind does not want to follow them, then what is the need of a guru? If we do not put in conscious efforts, who can make us conscious? A sleeping person can be awakened, but how do you waken one who pretends to be asleep though he is awake? One who does not try must know that his mind is not gracious to him. A real guru makes his disciple self-reliant. The guru tells the disciple that he must be able to stand on his own feet. The Lord has said in the *Gītā*: 'A man should uplift himself by his own self, so let him not weaken this self. For this self is the friend of oneself, and this self is the enemy of oneself.'¹ With his mind endowed with the sense of discrimination, a person should uplift himself and should not degrade himself. The pure mind is the friend of the jīva, for it helps him attain liberation. But a mind saturated with attachment for sense objects is an enemy to the jīva. Therefore, the scriptures never advise us to depend on others; no, not even on the guru. The guru shows the path and teaches us how to overcome the difficulties on the way, but the act of travelling on it can only be done by the disciple. 'God alone does everything; there is nothing that I can do'—we can say this only when our sense of 'doership' is completely obliterated, and not before. So long as the 'I' sense is very much alive and kicking within, it is hypocritical to say: 'It is He who does everything.' Therefore, one should abandon such hypocrisy and practise sādhanā systematically along the path laid out by the guru. This is how the Master's statement, 'If one receives the guru's grace, one has nothing to fear', can be properly appreciated. There should not be the least insincerity within us. The guru will let us know what our true nature is. But do we want to know it? Do

we have the capacity to receive the grace of the guru? If we only make a little effort by practising sādhanā, he shows the way. Then the disciple will understand: 'God alone is real, and everything else is unreal.' A disciple has to make at least this much effort; otherwise how can he understand the grace of the guru?

Let me tell you an incident from my own life. When I would ask a question to my Gurudeva, he would scold me: 'Is it proper to ask about all your petty problems?' Then he would immediately say in a sweet voice: 'Look, my child! Are we going to live forever? If you always depend on me then you will never be able to stand on your own feet. You will eventually have to find the answers to your questions from within.' We should think about this. The guru will help the disciple become self-reliant.

Even a little sādhanā enables a person to understand what is good and what is not. The Master cited the example of how by pretending to practise sādhanā the sense of renunciation dawned on a thief. Once a thief was afraid of being caught stealing fish, so he sat under a tree disguised as a holy man. Soon people began to gather there and offer salutations to him. Then a sense of renunciation was awakened in him. If a mere pretence of religious life could earn him such respect, he thought, then through real sādhanā God-realization was indeed possible. In that state one will surely realize that God alone is real, and the world is illusory.

Those to whom the Master was speaking about the unreality of the world were all householder devotees. Hearing this, a question arose in the mind of a devotee: 'What, then, will happen to those who live in the world? Must they too renounce it?' While this thought was tormenting his mind, Sri Ramakrishna, who could see into a man's inmost thought, said very tenderly: 'Suppose an office clerk has been sent to jail. He undoubtedly leads a prisoner's life there. But when he is released from jail, does he cut capers in the street? Not at all. He gets a job as a clerk again and goes on working as before.

Even after attaining Knowledge through the guru's grace, one can very well live in the world as a *jīvanmukta* (one who is free even while alive)."

A Jñānī and the World

If a person is liberated by divine grace, he feels that the world is unreal and without any essence, and that God alone is real. There is nothing wrong if he lives in the world then with this knowledge. It is not essential that he has to renounce the world. But we should give up attachment for sense objects in the world. If a person has no attachment, there is nothing wrong in living in the world. He can just as well live as a *jīvanmukta*. As regards the state of a *jīvanmukta*, the examples of King Janaka and the lady who devotedly served her husband, as told in the tale of *Dharmavyādha*,² may be cited. They lived in the world, free from all attachment, after attaining supreme Knowledge.

Everything depends on our outlook. The way we look at things determines whether we shall be free or bound. If we consider the world a mere shadow, then it will cease to become a source of attachment. The world will remain as it is, but we will have to change our outlook. A *jñānī* lives the same way a bound soul does. He too eats and sleeps. But one regards the world as real, while the other regards it as unreal. A bound soul works with attachment. A *jñānī* works with detachment, and so he performs better. We should always keep in mind that a *jñānī* never errs. That is because, being free from attachment, his behaviour is without flaw. Attachment breeds error. A *jñānī*, however, never takes a wrong step.

The Master was thus reassuring the householders. It is not necessary to renounce the world. But we have to live in the world in a detached way and reject the idea that the world is real. The feeling we have that the world is real is due to God, who exists everywhere. We should remember this and act with the awareness that God is in everything—in whatever we see

in the world. If we are able to realize that He alone is everywhere, then we have no reason to fear. The entire cosmos will be covered with God. Once we realize that He alone is the true Substance, then nothing can generate attachment in us.

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Ātmaiva hyātmāno bandhurātmaiva ripurātmanah.*

— *Gītā*, 6,5

2. *Mahābhārata*, Vanaparva, 174-180

CHAPTER 31

The Gospel (July 22, 1883)

At the beginning of the chapter M. gives a beautiful description of Dakshineshwar. The uniqueness of the description is what it is able to convey. Owing to the presence of the great saint, the ordinary beauty of the natural scenery is infused, as it were, with divine consciousness. While describing the flowing holy river, the Ganges, M. suggests how eager the Ganges is to reach the ocean. The idea is that those who came to the great saint were equally eager to reach their destination—that is, to be united with their chosen ideal.

Discrimination

Mani Mullick raised a topic. He had returned a few months back from a pilgrimage to Vārānasī and was recounting his experiences to the Master. Mani had seen a monk at Vārānasī who said: 'No religious experience is possible without the control of the sense-organs. Nothing could be achieved by merely crying, "God, God!"' The Master explained: 'Do you understand the views of teachers like him? According to them, one must first practice spiritual discipline: self-restraint, self-control, forbearance, and the like. Their aim is to attain Nirvāṇa. They are followers of Vedānta. They constantly discriminate saying, "Brahman alone is real, and the world illusory." But this is an extremely difficult path.' Immediately after that the Master stated one of the subtlest truths of religion: 'If the world is illusory, then you too are illusory. The

teacher who gives the instruction is equally illusory. His words, too, are as illusory as a dream. But this experience is beyond the reach of the ordinary man.' This has been discussed in many scriptures. The jñānī says: 'The world is illusory.' But this does not mean that the world is unreal in the state we are in at present. As long as we have the sense of ego, or have the feeling of 'I', then it is vain to discount the world as illusory like a dream. We enjoy everything, we behave the way other people do, but we talk glibly: 'The world is illusory like a dream.' Thus we fail to strike the balance between what we say and what we do. So the Master said, 'If the world is illusory then ...the teacher who gives the instruction is equally illusory. His words too are as illusory as a dream.'

In Vedānta there is lot of discussion about the 'illusoriness of illusion'. We need not discuss all that here since the arguments are very subtle. The subtleties of the scriptures are not easily intelligible to most people. But we shall try to understand the significance of the Master's words. The Master asks whether the person who says that the world is illusory does not belong to this world? If he does, then he too becomes illusory. And when his existence is an illusion, then all his words are also illusory. That means his saying that the world is illusory is also false. But 'the world is illusory' is not a false statement. Therefore, the statement 'the world is illusory' cannot be made in such a fashion. But Vedānta asserts that the world is illusory; the reason is, having established oneself on a higher plane, one can call the lower illusory. As long as I see the rope as a snake, I feel the same way as when I see a real snake. I get the same fear when I see the snake. So in that state of my mind the snake is not false. Had the snake been false I would not have been afraid. A false snake, like a picture of a snake, does not create such fear. When I see a rope as a snake, however, I am really frightened. I try to run away, and my heart beats fast. So in the given situation, the snake is indeed true. We cannot dismiss that truth as false. But when we acquire the knowledge of the rope and identify it as a rope, we

say it is a piece of rope and not a snake. Therefore, as long as I do not have the knowledge of the rope, the perception of the snake is not false. This is to be clearly understood. Until one realizes Brahman, the world does not become illusory.

Indeed, it is mockery to declare this world as illusory so long as we live here, enjoy it, behave as others do, and accept it through all our sense organs. What we say and what we do would then be totally inconsistent. We shall be in a position to declare this world as illusory only when we do not have even the slightest attraction for it. Suppose we see something that glitters. If we know that even if it glitters it is just a piece of nacre and not silver, then we will not run after it or try to secure it. However, if we think it is silver and run to snatch it, it does not befit us to say: 'It's just a piece of nacre and not silver.'

Our scriptures have said that this world exists as long as we experience it. It is like seeing the snake in the rope. I mistakenly see a snake in a rope and as long as I continue to see it as a snake, it is real to me. It is real to me means that the snake is real in the state in which I am the witness. However, the snake is not independently real. That is, if somebody else looks at it differently, or again if I observe it well and understand it to be a piece of rope, then the snake ceases to be real. With the change in my state of perception, its reality disappears. Only then it is possible to assert that the snake is false, and certainly not before that. So long as we do not realize Brahman the world will be true. We have named this truth 'relative truth'. The expression 'relative truth' signifies that it is true as long it is experienced. So long as we live in this phenomenal world, in the state of dualism—or to put it in simple terms, so long our 'I' exists—this world also exists. In that state, therefore, we have no right to say that the world is illusory. If we are ever able to efface our ego, if we are ever able to leave this phenomenal world and attain the transcendental world, or attain the sublime Absolute Truth, then alone will this world appear to us as illusory, and not before that.

Injunctions Related to the World

Until we realize the Absolute Truth, which is eternally true, in all states and in all conditions, we shall have to consider this world to be real. And since we have to consider it to be real in this manner, we say that to reach the Absolute there is need of sādhanā. If the world is illusory and if the dualistic ideas are false, where then is the need for so much sādhanā? If the world is illusory, then there is no need for sādhanā since sādhanā also is illusory. This particular aspect has been specially emphasized in our scriptures: If this world is illusory and if the 'I' ceases to exist, then for whom is the teaching, 'hear about it, reflect on it, and meditate on it' (śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana) prescribed? But the scriptures state that it is necessary to acquire Self-knowledge, for which one has to hear. And having heard, one has to think and meditate. Now this 'has to be done' is for whom? Who will do it? Who is supposed to perform it? If there is no second other than Brahman, then for whom is the advice meant? Who advises whom? So the world cannot be rejected in this manner. When this phenomenal world is accepted as true, the scriptural injunctions become relevant. 'Do this', 'Don't do this', or 'This is good and that is bad'—all such instructions become meaningful then. It has been said in the *Gītā*, 'He does not kill, nor does he become bound even by killing these creatures.'¹ Because in reality he does nothing. He has realized the Absolute Truth; he has identified himself with the pure, attributeless Self. Following what is said can we indulge in fanciful behaviour? Then where shall it lead us to? Obviously, all ethical injunctions will become useless. They will cease to have any utility or meaning. That is why the scriptures say, as long as the 'I'—our sense of ego—persists, all these are real. Since this bondage is real to you, you have to perform sādhanā to be free from this 'real bondage', because the scriptures provide you with ways and means of how to cast off the bondage. If you are liberated even while living, then you do not

need all these. The Upanishad says '[In the liberated state] the Vedas are no Vedas', i.e. they become one with ignorance. Because no longer is there any need for the teachings of the Vedas. Who will require the Vedas? Who will study? To whom will it be told? In the state when the Self alone abides, when no other state exists, then the scriptures have no use.

Adhyāsa Bhāṣhya and the Māndukya Kārikā

It is for this reason that Āchārya Śankara said: 'All activities pertaining to the phenomenal and the non-phenomenal world are intermixed with truth and untruth.' Activities include both mundane activities as well as those prescribed by the Vedas. All the Vedic injunctions dealing with sacrifices, and so on, all mundane activities like eating, working, etc., and all ethico-normative scriptures, and even those related to liberation—all are intermixed with truth and untruth. Truth means that which is eternal and changeless, while untruth means the changeable, evolutionary element which is combined with Truth. We combine these two together, make them non-different, and forget their differences to follow both the Vedic as well as the secular injunctions.

Keeping in view this Absolute, eternal, changeless Truth, it has been said: 'The Absolute Truth is that there is no destruction, nor origination. None is a bound soul, and none is an aspirant, nor are there seekers of liberation, or those called the liberated.' It is erroneous to bring the Absolute Truth down to the relative plane, as it causes much confusion. We should keep this in mind. The Master recounted an incident about a holy man who stayed in the Panchavati. He used to speak incessantly on Vedānta to people. Hearing people speaking ill of him, the Master was disturbed and asked him: 'You talk so much about Vedānta. But what is all this talk about you?' The holy man replied, 'What does it matter? I can prove to you that there is no harm in it. When it is a fact that the world is unreal in the past, the present, and the future, will my action alone be

real? That is also unreal.' You must have read in what language the Master blasted his pseudo-interpretation of Vedānta. The Master was severely critical of people who indulge in unethical activities while talking pretentiously about Vedānta. Because this brand of Vedānta not only fails to lead us to the right path, it is positively harmful. This is because by declaring 'I am Brahman' we put ourselves at a level which is beyond all restrictions, thus usurping the right to uncontrolled activities which degrade us.

On 'That' and 'Thou'

It is necessary to understand the expressions 'I am Brahman', and 'Thou art That', which are used in Vedānta. In the scriptures there is mention of inquiry into That (tat) and Thou (tvam). The 'That' concept is the cause of the universe, or Brahman, while 'Thou' means the individual self. Thus the two expressions 'That' and 'thou' are to be enquired into and their special significance brought out. In other words, it is not enough if we understand these two entities the way we normally do. There are deeper truths hidden behind these words, which have to be uncovered and their proper significance comprehended. 'Thou' means the individual soul which identifies itself with the body, sense organs, and ego. This entity was born at some date, is young or middle-aged or old, and will die at a later date. It is impossible for such an entity to become Brahman. Brahman is altogether different. One who is subject to birth, decay and death can never be the imperishable, changeless, immovable Brahman. So when the scriptures say, 'Tat tvam asi' or 'Thou art That', one has to understand what is really meant by the word 'Thou'. 'Thou' means the changeless entity or that, which remains after shedding the separable elements from the changeless entity. These separable elements, such as the sense organs and ego are transitory. Again, by 'That' we normally understand He who creates, sustains, and destroys the world. The doership of the

work of creation-sustenance-destruction depends upon the act of creation-sustenance-destruction. How else can creatorship come to Him? But He who is possessed of creatorship, etc., is necessarily subject to change. The moment He is the doer, He is subject to change. So here by That (Tat) we do not mean even Īśvara (the Creator-preserver-destroyer). Behind Him and against His background there exists a changeless Entity, which does not create, sustain, or destroy; does not engage in any act. He is referred to here as 'That'. Therefore, through analysis of the expressions, 'That' and 'Thou' we reach the non-dual, changeless, imperishable Entity that lies behind them, and we do not find any reason to differentiate between them. No other property exists that separates them. That is why these two are stated as one and non-different.

Dualism is True on the Relative Plane

It has been analysed, explained, and reiterated time and again in the scriptures that in the 'knowledge of Unity', the 'Unity' referred to can never be possible in the relative plane. If this knowledge of Oneness of Vedānta is applied in the relative plane, it becomes but an abuse of Vedānta, which was criticized by the Master. Those who misuse Vedānta are mere pretenders—pseudo-Vedāntists. The scriptures have cautioned the aspirants against becoming such hypocrites. The Master says it is better to maintain a difference than adopt this pseudo-oneness. He further teaches that the aspirants can make progress by accepting duality in this way: He and I are different; I am the servant, He is the Lord; I am His child, He is my Father, or my Mother; and so on.

The Real Significance of the Scriptures

When the scriptures teach the knowledge of Oneness they do not reject the differences that exist in the relative plane. Let us give an example. Whatever is made of gold is

gold. A pot made of gold, a bowl made of gold, an image of an elephant made of gold—all these are gold. But the pot of gold and the elephant made of gold are not identical. Everything is formed of five elements—whether it is sand or sesame seeds. But when we try to extract oil we do not crush sand; we crush sesame seeds. If everything is but Brahman then sand is Brahman and so are sesame seeds. Or, the sand and sesame seeds are one and the same. Therefore oil is also supposed to be extracted out of sand. But it never happens. So, whatever differences persist in the relative plane should be maintained. We cannot dismiss the relative plane as nothing. One can as well imagine the situation when a plate of sand is served before one of those who profess that everything is Brahman, saying: 'Come, sir, food is Brahman and the sand too is Brahman. So kindly eat it!'

When we say everything is Brahman, we do not mean that it is so on the relative plane. We say that everything is Brahman, and that the individual self and Brahman are One, keeping in view the Truth which abides behind all relativity, that which is Absolute, that which is totally attributeless, and that which never perishes. Otherwise, the individual self (*jīva*), which we consider to have finite knowledge and finite powers, and *Īśvara* who is full of knowledge, the abode of all powers, and is responsible for creation, etc., can never be non-different. If they were non-different then the *jīva* would be competent to create. But it can never do that, because it is possessed of finite powers. About the *jīva* the scriptures say: 'The individual self is to be known as of the size of the tip of a hair imagined to be divided into a hundredth of its hundredth part.'² So how big is a *jīva* in this vast universe? It is the minutest of the minute, and most insignificant. And if that *jīva* declares 'I am Brahman', it sounds like the wild ravings of a lunatic.

So this is not the way to say, 'I am Brahman'. The infinite Being that exists within me, the Being that makes all my activities possible, owing to which I am a separate entity—

thinking I exist, I feel, I am revealed, I have attained the knowledge of my own Self, and so on—that Being is actually non-different from Brahman. We have no idea at all about that Essence; yet we declare: 'I am Brahman.' Sri Ramakrishna said: 'You may repeat, "There is no thorn, no pain," but the moment you touch the thorn, you feel the prick and cry out in pain.' We may say: I am not the body, I am not the individual self possessed of the body, and so on. But every moment we are made to feel that we are the individual self having a body, that we pass through old age and death, and we are bound with all kinds of fetters. About this 'I' we say: 'It is free from all bondage.' It is sheer madness. We knew a mad man who used to say, 'I am the Maharaja of such-and-such state!' He would scribble something on a piece of paper and say while handing it to a person: 'I am giving you a cheque for four lakhs of rupees. Go and encash it.' But he did not have a single paise in the bank. This is insanity. We call someone insane who talks incoherently and whose words are not in conformity with facts. So if we draw a blank in our realization of the Truth, and nonetheless keep on saying 'I am Brahman', then it is nothing but insanity. We know through and through that we are but individuals having a body, that we were born a few days before, and shall die after a few days, that our entire life is bound with thousands of fetters; yet, we say: 'I am Brahman.' This is sheer madness. The Master repeatedly warned us against such a false ego. Because in that case no room is left for further development. We will never try to attain a higher state because out of madness we call it false. No one strives to attain a false object. So the path for the realization of the Supreme gets blocked.

Experience is what Counts

We say dreams are false. When do we say that? Only when are awake. We do not say dreams are false while we are dreaming. At that time we regard them as very much true.

Only after we wake up we say dreams are false. But as long as we are in the dream state, the objects appearing in dreams are as true as the objects that appear in our waking state, if not more. Only when we wake up and realize that the objects of dream are false, can the state of dreaming be regarded as false. In the same way if we say that the state of waking is false, we shall have to reach a stage higher than that state. Only then shall we realize that the waking state is also false and shall earn the right to assert it as false. As long as we are in the waking state we have no right to discount it as false. Then why do the scriptures and the teachers say, 'The world is unreal'? They say so because this teaching is necessary to rouse us to attain the transcendental Reality. If one cries out aloud while sleeping, he is shaken and asked to wake up, saying, 'You are dreaming. Wake up.' The scriptures or the teachers do not say: 'Imagine that this world is unreal.' Such imagination can never convince us of the unreality of this world. As long as we do not reach the transcendental Reality, and attain Self-realization (*aparokshānubhūti*), this world will remain as true tomorrow as it is today. So the world in the relative plane cannot be cast off as unreal. That is why the Master says that one has to ignore the words of a person who discards the world in that manner before attaining illumination. The Master despised such pseudo-Vedāntic teachings.

Sri Ramakrishna's Example

The Master then cited an example: 'Do you know what it is like? If you burn camphor nothing remains. When wood is burnt at least a little ash is left.' When camphor is burnt nothing remains. The idea is that as we begin to shed our limiting adjuncts (*upādhis*) and our 'sheaths', what is left finally? Is there a vacuum? Not exactly. What remains if all the changeable entities, those undergoing constant transformation, within the ego which is the basis of all our activities and which we call 'I', are removed one by one? Only the One remains. The remnant is

that Self who caused the removal of the sheaths. We may remove the upādhis one after another, but how can we remove our Self? We remove all the sheaths one after another, but that One Reality remains. No one is there to remove that. The idea is that when the jīva is freed of all sheaths, then it becomes soundless, inviolable, formless, and immutable, the essence of Brahman. Then its jīvahood ceases to exist. Swamiji expresses this state of Vedānta in the words: '... where all negations cease.' When an aspirant discriminates following the process of 'Not this, not this', he ultimately realizes this Truth: 'That One is formless, nameless, colourless, without past, without future, spaceless, bereft of all dimensions', which is called Brahman, and which, indeed, is the essence of all living beings.

De-superimposition of what is Superimposed

The process by which the body, the sense organs and so on are negated one after another is called de-superimposition (apavāda). To remove everything that is attributed to me, imposed on me by different sheaths is called apavāda of adhyāropa (superimposition). It is as if the soul is placed under several covers and those covers are removed one after another. When the process of removal of the covers is exhausted and nothing is left, then 'That' alone remains. It cannot be said that nothing is left. The Master explained this subtle truth of Vedānta with the help of several examples. He said that nothing would be left if the layers were removed one after another from an onion. In the same way, as the superimposed sheaths are removed, then nothing is left. But when we say nothing is left, we mean nothing that can be removed is left. As one goes on negating, 'I am not this, I am not this,' one reaches a stage where nothing is there to be rejected, where all negation stops, and where words are impossible. It cannot be explained by words. It baffles description. Who is going to describe it? The Master said: 'Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. It wanted to tell others how deep the water was. But this

it could never do, for no sooner did it get into the water than it dissolved. Now who was there to report the ocean's depth?' Salt and doll—these two words are worth noting. Salt is the essence of the doll. It is all salt, only it also has a form. Salt is also the essence of the ocean. The salt doll goes into the ocean to measure it and finds out what it contains. But it dissolves as soon as it goes in. Its form is also washed away. Who is to report back? When a jīva goes in search of Brahman and is freed one after another from its coverings, the attributes that differentiate it from Brahman, who then is left to speak about the essence of Brahman?

The Upanishad on the Jīva

'O Gautama, as pure water poured in pure water becomes verily the same, so also does become the self of the man of knowledge who is given to deliberation (on the Self).'³ Then a jīva is not left with any special feature to differentiate it from Brahman. It becomes identical with Brahman. But this identity is not acquired. Just because the coverings are removed one after another, like one sheds clothes from one's body, it cannot be said that the jīva earns its identity with Brahman by some act. Here is an example: A pitcher is submerged in the sea. Though we may say 'the water in the pitcher' to differentiate it from 'the water in the sea', in reality the same water is in the pitcher as in the sea. It is as if the structure of the pitcher has shaped the water in it. What becomes of the water if the pitcher is broken? Does it mix with the sea water? It is already one with the sea. The water in the pitcher has never been different from that of the sea. It has always been one and the same. Only because of the covering it is considered to be different. Now through discrimination our sense of difference is cast off. The attainment of Brahman by the jīva means the shedding of the sense of difference which is responsible for the crystallisation of the 'I' sense. One does not earn that state by some act. What was there, remains, that is all.

REFERENCES

1. *Hatvāpi sa imam lokanna hanti na nibadhyate.*

— *Gītā*, 18.17

2. *Vālagrashatabhāgasya śatadhā kalpitasya cha bhāgo jīvaḥ ...*

— *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad*, 5.9

3. *Yathodakam śuddhe śuddhamāsiktam tādrigeva bhavati*

Evam munervijānata Ātmā bhavati Gautama.

— *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.15

CHAPTER 32

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

A devotee who came from Konnagar (a village in West Bengal) asked Sri Ramakrishna a question which very often arises in our minds too: 'Sir, we hear that you go into samādhi and experience ecstasy. Please explain why and how you get into that mood.' The question is absurd! Can hearing a few words from a person give us a clear idea of the state about which we have absolutely no idea at all? And shall we be able to understand him?

Bhāva and Mahābhāva

Sri Ramakrishna is the ocean of unconditional mercy, and this mercy is not tainted by any self-interest. Without objecting, he immediately began explaining the characteristics of the state of ecstasy. He said: 'Sri Rādhā used to experience mahābhāva. If any of her companions wanted to touch her while she was in that state, another of them would say: "Please do not touch that body, the playground of Sri Krishna. Krishna is now sporting in her body."' It means that in such a state God and the devotee become one. Only the body of the devotee is there while inside God manifests in His full glory. This is called mahābhāva, because in that supreme mood all other moods disappear and only the divine mood becomes prominent. An ordinary devotee can also experience the state of bhāva as the consummation of his sādhanā, but that is not the state of mahābhāva. In him divine love is only partially manifested.

The Master has said that an ordinary jīva cannot experience mahābhāva. Rādhā used to experience it. But an ordinary jīva does not possess the strength to experience mahābhāva. The citing of Rādhā's example does not suggest that nobody else has experienced mahābhāva, nor that none else can do so. It means that one who attains the state of mahābhāva ceases to be an ordinary mortal; he or she attains the nature of Rādhā. Such an individual's ego is completely effaced and he or she becomes the playground of God. In the state of mahābhāva, the one who experiences and that which is experienced do not remain different but merge into one. We get some idea about the features of this mahābhāva from the discussions Sri Chaitanya had with Roy Rāmānanda. While discussing about madhura-bhāva (the attitude of a woman towards her beloved) Roy Rāmānanda said, "'He' and 'I', are both merged into one."¹ It then appears as if the force of intense desire and love has mixed both minds into one. Owing to the desire or the intense yearning for God, the minds of God and the devotee become merged into one. That is the characteristic of mahābhāva. At that time Sri Krishna is not a male nor is Rādhā a female—both God and the devotee have simply become one.

It is clear that one experiences this state of bhāva or mahābhāva only after the realization of God. It is impossible for one who has not realized God to try to understand the experience intellectually. Still, the Master tried to explain the state by giving examples: 'When a fish comes up from a great depth, you see a movement on the surface of the water; and if it is a big one there is much splashing about. That is why a devotee "laughs and weeps and dances and sings in ecstasy of God."' This refers to the ordinary state of ecstasy, not to speak of the state of mahābhāva. When divine love overwhelms the mind, it becomes very difficult to control it. The Master clarified this with the help of yet another novel example: 'One cannot remain in bhāva very long. People take a man to be crazy if he sits before a mirror and looks at his face all the time.' To be seated before a mirror means to be in the presence

of God. In His presence one can no longer look at one's face. The face of 'I' that is reflected in that mirror ceases to be the 'I'. The 'I' vanishes, being completely immersed in Him.

God-realization: Its Features

Next, the devotee from Konnagar asked the Master: 'Sir, we hear that you see God. If you do, please show Him to us.' It's indeed a wonderful statement! Verily, if he who has seen God doesn't show Him to us, then why should we trust his words? The same thing has been said in the Upanishads: 'Anybody may indeed say, "I know, I know." Well tell us, what do you know?'² Will it suffice to say that I have seen God as I see you? Is there nothing verifiable in what is said? Yes, there is. What is that? In the *Gītā* we find a description of a person of steady wisdom (sthitaprajna). The qualities of one who is established in Brahman are described there. We have to judge the behaviour of one who claims that he has seen God to ascertain if it conforms with that of a person of steady wisdom. If we do not do that then we will be like a blind person intending to reach Vaikuntha (heaven) by holding on to the tail of a cow. Hence, Sri Ramakrishna instructed his disciples: 'Test me as the money changers test their coins. You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly.' The Master alone could have said this and, indeed, many of his disciples did test him. Swamiji fought with him until the end, and the Master encouraged him to fight. But after continued inquiries, when the mind is convinced of someone's genuineness, the aspirant must submit to him without any reservation. Henceforth, one should not be sceptical at each and every step, because this will adversely affect one's progress in sādhanā. Of course, in special cases, depending upon the quality of the individuals, the Master also advised people to accept the words of the guru. But that has a different context.

How do we judge if someone has steady wisdom? There are two methods of doing this: the first is the sva-samvedya

method and the other is the para-samvedya method. It is para-samvedya when onlookers study the person with reference to the qualities mentioned in the scriptures. But when the aspirant dives deep within himself, verifies and understands the features himself it is sva-samvedya. By listening to devotional songs, or by performing a little japa for one or two days, many people are seen to shed tears, or have ecstatic thrills, or tremblings, and so on. But it should be borne in mind that these states are neither bhāva nor mahābhāva. More often than not these are mere physical contortions. So, before jumping to conclusions that someone has seen God, or has experienced His presence, or that such and such is a great soul because he passes into bhāvasamādhi, and so on, it is necessary to analyse whether the impurities in his or her mind are steadily waning or not, whether that person is really developing dispassion or not, or whether there is increasingly more divine attraction or not. In the words of Sri Rama-krishna: 'The more you go towards the east, the more you move away from the west.' So if we do not develop distaste for worldly pleasures while we are on our way to God, it does not matter what signs are seen in our body; we must understand that these are not the outcome of our journey towards God. In the words of the Master: 'Sense pleasures appear more and more tasteless as love for God grows.' At that stage our minds will be so busy with God and be immersed so deeply in Him, it will not leave us any scope to think about anything else. Besides, one should bear in mind that moving Godward is not such an easy affair, like snatching away a plaything from a child. His grace will come only after prolonged spiritual practice. Then one develops dispassion for worldly objects as well as intense love and devotion for God. As a person's devotion to God increases, his attachment for the pleasures of the world decreases more and more, his ideas about the nature of God becomes clearer, and his doubt dissolve.

There is a verse in the *Bhāgavata* which wonderfully describes this position: 'A person has not eaten any food for a

long time. When food is given to him, with each morsel the unhappiness due to hunger is removed, his weakness goes, and his hunger pangs depart. In the same way, he who goes towards God, and surrenders to Him has a similar feeling. His devotion and love for God increases, his concept of God becomes clearer, and he has dispassion for everything other than God.³

Indeed, this is the touchstone. Tears, tremblings and other physical signs are not infallible symptoms.

Patience and God-vision

The devotee from Konnagar wanted to test the Master: 'Sir, we hear that you see God. If you do, please show Him to us.' And what did the Master reply? He said: 'Everything depends on God's will. What can a man do? While chanting God's name, sometimes tears flow and at other times the eyes remain dry. While meditating on God, some days I feel a great deal of inner awakening, and some days I feel nothing.' The sole intention of the Master in saying so was to see that we do not get discouraged. Most of the time our minds do not experience any emotion, nor do we feel the bliss that one gets by loving Him or by seeing Him. Then we feel restless and complain: 'Why, nothing is happening to us.' The Master's assurance is for such moments of despair: 'Everything depends on God's will.' One must wait for His grace. The same message of awaiting has been conveyed through the 'Parable of Ten Virgins' in the *Bible* and the tale of Śabarī in the *Rāmāyana*. These parables are meant to illustrate: Be prepared. The women who stayed had brought extra oil for their lamps. Śabarī had waited for Sri Rāmachandra since she was a child. Her childhood went by. Youth came and went. Old age came, and when she had become very frail, her Chosen Ideal appeared before her. So it will not do to remain absorbed in worldliness on the plea that we could not attain God. We shall have to meditate and wait for Him with intense longing. This is the significance of the Master's statement.

The Attainment of God through Sāadhanā

How did the Master react to the words 'please show Him to us'? It is not possible to show God to someone just like that. We have to make ourselves fit for it. That is why he said: 'A man must work. Only then can he see God.' One day in an exalted mood he had a vision of the Haldarpukur (a big tank at Kāmārpukur, the Master's native place). Referring to that, he said: 'In that vision it was revealed to me that the water cannot be seen without pushing aside the green scum that covers it; that is to say, one cannot develop love of God or obtain His vision without work. Work means meditation, japa, and the like. The chanting of God's name and glories is work too. You may also include charity, sacrifice, and so on.' Works like charity, sacrifice, etc., are ritualistic while japa and so on are real sāadhanā. But God is not attained through such work; He is attained through His grace alone. The Master had said earlier: 'Everything depends on God's will.' So where is the scope for work? Karma is needed because we can never live without work. So such work that allows us to remember Him should be taken up. In this regard the Master cited a beautiful example. A thief enters a room to steal, only to find that he has broken into the wrong room. There is no gold there. It is kept in the next room. What will the thief do in such a situation—will he keep quiet or fall asleep? No; he becomes restless to find out how he can get into the next room so that he can steal the gold. In the same way, an aspirant who really seeks God's vision cannot remain idle and sit quiet till God's grace is bestowed on him. Instead, he becomes restless and moves about with intense longing, and he engages himself in that sāadhanā which will help him reach God. That is why the Master said: 'A man must work.... If you want butter, you must let the milk turn to curd. It must be left in a quiet place. When the milk becomes curd, you must work hard to churn it. Only then can you get butter from the milk.' By asking to be shown God, if someone feels that he should not take up any sāadhanā or related work but

remain idle, it will simply not work. That is why Sri Ramakrishna says after a little while: 'What a nuisance! Someone must show God to a man, while he himself sits idly by all the while. Someone must extract the butter and hold it in front of his mouth!'

It is not that one cannot reach the goal by remaining passive all through. But it is indeed very difficult. In such a state an aspirant's ego is completely effaced and he is totally devoid of the sense of doership. Under all circumstances one has to remain conscious that one is not the doer, but a mere onlooker, a witness, an instrument and nothing more than that. But it is almost impossible for ordinary aspirants to maintain this attitude all through. While chanting His name, the feeling to act 'as and when He wills' comes all right, but in other matters no one knows from where the sense of doership and ego surface. We are not even aware of it, and that is indeed the greatest deception we perpetrate on our mind. So the advice for us is: 'A man must work. Only then can he see God.'

While the Master was impressing the need for work on the devotees, Mahimacharan said: 'That is true, sir. Work is certainly necessary. One must labour hard. Only then does one succeed. There is so much to read! The scriptures are endless!' Then the Master replied: 'How much of the scriptures can you read? What will you gain by mere reasoning? Try to realize God before anything else. Have faith in the guru's words, and work. If you have no guru, then pray to God with a longing heart. He will let you know what He is like.'

The Scriptures, Surrender, and the Guru

Here the main point is to have firm faith in the words of the scriptures and the guru. What does one gain by reasoning alone? When we try to understand Him through the process of reasoning we only exercise our intellect. It is not possible to realize Him by intelligence; but again we do not have any other instrument than the intellect through which we can realize

Him. That is why it has been said that we cannot know Him 'through this intelligence'. The scriptures also contain such contradictory statements: 'That which man does not comprehend with the mind, that by which, they say, the mind is encompassed....'⁴ Again it is said elsewhere: 'This is to be attained through the mind indeed...'⁵ The true significance of these contradictory statements is—that He is beyond our mind and intelligence, but He is realizable through the pure mind and the purified intellect. The true significance of the scriptures is revealed only when the mind and the intellect are purified. It is not necessary to acquire the knowledge of limitless scriptures. This is because even if we reason a thousand times He cannot be attained through that. 'It is not to be attained through argumentation,'⁶ '...nor through the intellect, or through much hearing.'⁷ What is needed is implicit faith in the words of the guru and the scriptures as also a purified intellect. However, if the fence itself eats away the crops what do we do then? In the same way, if the intellect through which we comprehend the scriptures is not purified, then what is the use of studying the scriptures? Mahimacharan was proud of his scholarship, so the Master specially pointed out to him the futility of merely studying the scriptures, and put more stress on faith, reverence, and intense longing. He said: 'What will you learn of God from books? As long as you are at a distance from the market-place you hear only an indistinct roar. But it is quite different when you are actually there. Then you hear and see everything distinctly. You hear people saying: "Here are your potatoes. Take them and give me the money." From a distance you hear only the rumbling noise of the ocean. Go near it and you will see many boats sailing about, birds flying, and waves rolling. One cannot get a true feeling about God from the study of books. That feeling is something very different from book-learning. 'Books, scriptures, and science appear as mere dirt and straw after the realization of God.'

Thus the Master repeatedly stressed the importance of knowing Him. But it is not possible to know Him through

study of the scriptures alone. The scriptures are endless; over and above that, they contain contradictory statements. Who will resolve them? The scriptures contain a mixture of useful and useless things like a mixture of sand and sugar. That is why the Master said: '...pray to God with a longing heart. He will let you know what He is like.' One must then verify that knowledge with the scriptures. These three things should tally—the scriptures, reasoning, and realization. The scriptures are records of experience, and their utility lies in making these experiences understandable to the intellect. That is why the Master said: 'How much of the scriptures can you read? What will you gain by mere reasoning?' If the mind with which I learn becomes sick, unclean, or disorderly then how can it reveal the Truth? It is therefore necessary to remove all impurities from the mind. This is why the advice is given: 'Have faith in the guru's words, and work.' So the primary injunction is, 'Have faith in the guru's words.' What can one achieve without faith? One who has no faith (*śraddhā*) cannot progress in any direction. Where there is no faith, there is doubt everywhere. So a person without faith loses at both ends. Faith is the first step of *sādhana*. Having that one should conscientiously follow the instructions of the guru.

The Master has compared the knowledge that a person with an impure mind gains through mere book-learning to the noise of the market-place heard from a distance, or to the rumbling noise of the ocean. Just as from a distance various sounds in a market create a meaningless noise, or the sound of the ocean is just a roar, in the same way, the study of scriptures with an impure mind fails to reveal their true meaning. The essence of religion 'lies hidden in the heart (*Nihitam guhāyām*)'. It is beyond ordinary intelligence. The scholars can at best study the scriptures and put forward different shades of commentaries and explanations. This is why it has been humourously said: 'He is no sage who does not hold a different opinion.' So, 'That is indeed the path which is traversed by great souls.' The Master impresses on us that it is

our primary duty to reverentially follow the teachings of those who have gone beyond the scriptures and realized the supreme Truth.

The Master said: 'Books, scriptures and science appear as mere dirt and straw after the realization of God.' The Master tries to make us understand that the transcendental experience one has after the vision of God cannot be gained by studying books. Books are but creations of the human intellect. Science also deals with objects within the purview of the intellect. It provides us knowledge derived only from sense perception. It fails to enlighten us regarding super-sensuous ideas. So when an aspirant has seen God, or, has attained illumination, he feels that the objects of sense perception are mere dirt and straw. Of course, one who is yet to realize God cannot appreciate the insignificance of the world, because all our wealth and opulence are the result of science. As regards the scriptures the Master said on another occasion: 'The almanac forecasts the rainfall of the year. But not a drop of water will you get by squeezing the almanac. No, not even one drop.' It is true that many things are recorded in the scriptures, but a mere study of those things fails to evoke any feeling. You may read many things about parental love in the books, but all book-knowledge pales into insignificance when one enjoys the sweet feeling of loving one's own child. But after enjoying this sweet feeling, one may compare it with the descriptions of such feelings and find similarities. In the same way, after one has attained God-realization, one may verify one's realizations with those described in the scriptures and derive pleasure thereby.

Easy Ways to Attain God:

Intense Longing and Living in Solitude

One's own realization is the essential thing; there, book-learning becomes insignificant. 'In that state...the Vedas are not the Vedas. So the Master advised: 'The one thing needful is

to be introduced to the master of the house. Why are you so anxious to know beforehand how many houses and gardens, how many government securities, the master possesses? The servants of the house would not allow you even to approach these, and they would certainly not tell you about their master's investments. Therefore, somehow or other become acquainted with the master, even if you have to jump over the fence or take a few pushes from the servants. Then the master himself will tell you all about his houses and gardens and his government securities. And what is more, the servants and the door-keeper will salute you when you are known to the master.' Sri Ramakrishna says this as if it were an easy thing: 'The one thing needful is to be introduced to the master of the house.' But how can we be introduced to the master? So the advice is: 'Call on Him in solitude and pray to Him. Weep for Him with a longing heart, "O Lord! Reveal Thyself to me." You roam about in search of "woman and gold" like a madman; now be a little mad for God. Let people say, "This man has lost his head for God." Why not renounce everything for a few days and call on God in solitude?' Nobody will listen if he is asked to go into solitude for long. So the Master says that one should go into solitude at least for a few days and call on God. For calling on God he does not ask a person to perform ostentatious ceremonies or sacrifices spending thousands of rupees, or severe physical austerities. Instead he says, 'Call on Him in solitude with a longing heart.' However, the longing should be sincere, not superficial. And our prayer should be made with earnestness. This appears to be easy, but we fail right at the beginning. For we hardly have any time to go into solitude and we never feel like crying for God. How then do we attain Him? Even Kabir says the same thing: 'If you seek Me truly even for a fraction of a second, then and then alone will I come to you.' But we fail to call on Him with such sincere and one-pointed yearning. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna asks us to call on God in solitude. 'Solitary place' means a place where the mind will not be distracted by other things. He is not referring to places like a

desolate forest infested by wild animals, or the Sahara desert. Those places are meant where no persons are present to distract us. All the aspirants who sincerely think of God and practise sādhanā have had similar experiences. For example, a mother is all set to meditate on God, with her mind composed, having drawn it away from other objects. Just then her child gets hurt and cries out, and her entire mind goes towards it. Who is to be blamed —the child or the mind? Our mind is ever vigilant, as it were, to receive calls from any source other than God. When the mind is in such a state it is futile to try to orient it towards God, as the efforts to concentrate it on Him will fail. Rather, it is because of distractions all around that we do not make any effort at all. Hence, solitude is necessary. However, going into solitude alone is not sufficient. We must also call on Him with intense longing. So many people live in solitude, but thoughts of God never come to their minds. Such a life is of no use. Most people feel that such an isolated life is a punishment. So merely living in solitude is not adequate. One must also have intense longing. How do we cry with an intensely yearning heart? Anticipating such a question the Master says: 'People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money. But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with a real cry.' It is but natural that we shed a jugful of tears for worldly objects, because our minds are created that way. That is why the Master advises us to divert the mind, which is so attracted by worldly objects, towards God. It has been said in the *Vishnu Purāṇa*: 'O Lord, when I shall meditate on Thee, let my mind be filled with such limitless love for Thee which a foolish, ignorant man has for worldly objects.'⁸

But the Master says that even this is not adequate. Our yearning has to be more intense than that. 'God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife.' Examples of things we have no experience of fail to create any impact on us. So the

Master gives examples of these three attractions, which we can well understand. But if only the sky falls shall we catch the larks.

Practise and Dispassion

Everybody wants an easy path—a simple technique, or a mantra which will instantly put his or her mind on God. But there is no such thing. There is no such technique which can instantly calm the mind. Had there been any such trick Lord Krishna would have taught it to Arjuna. Even He says that the mind is indeed very restless; but the way to calm it lies in practice and dispassion. Practice means trying repeatedly, while dispassion means disregarding worldly objects which distract the mind, so that the mind will not run after them. This is the only way. 'What will you achieve by simply saying that God exists and doing nothing about it? There are big fish in the Haldarpukur, but can you catch them by merely sitting idly on the bank? Prepare some spiced bait and throw it into the lake. Then the fish will come from the deep water and you will see ripples. That will make you happy. Perhaps a fish will jump with a splash and you will get a glimpse of it. Then you will be so glad!' If we ardently seek God, then instead of simply saying that He exists, we would earnestly follow the known paths which lead to Him and go forward. 'If you want butter, you must let milk turn to curd.' Of course, we know that Sri Ramakrishna possessed extraordinary divine powers, and he could have instantly given everything the devotees wished. Who else is capable of this? But, if someone does not want to do anything himself, it means that he does not feel intense longing for God or the need for Him. 'Oh, how nice it would be to attain God! If only I could lay hold of Him I would see that my household needs are taken care of'—this is our idea. None of us want Him; as we do not consider Him the ultimate goal of our life. Rather, we consider Him only as a means to an end. God just smiles at this and thinks: 'You've chained yourself by the effects of your own actions. What can I do to redeem you?'

The fruits of our actions are but our own creation. We keep spinning webs of desires and then get entangled therein. There is a way out by tearing apart the web, but we lack the will to do so. As the Master said: 'The fish gets into the trap made of bamboo. If it feels so inclined, it can swim out through the same way it came in, but it doesn't do so, possibly under the impression that there's no way out.' We have chained ourselves with innumerable desires. Our desires are never satiated and we never get out of the bondage of the world. The Master gives yet another example: 'The king lives in the inner court of the palace. But there are seven gates and one must pass through them one by one before one can expect to see him.' But do we have the patience to do this? We say, 'For the last seven days we have called on God, but where is He?' As if, there is a contract by which He is obliged to appear before us if we call on Him for seven days. If we sincerely long for Him, then even though we may struggle wholeheartedly all our life, we would still feel it is inadequate. We often think: why do we get other things through our efforts, but we do not attain Him, try as we may? We forget that our very efforts to attain Him are insincere. Do we consider Him as necessary as the air we breathe? Do we feel suffocated without Him? Throughout the ages rishis and saints worked hard and exhausted themselves to attain Him. Whereas we think that by repeating His name even a hundred and eight times takes too much time, and we want to cut it short. Is this 'adequate effort'? We can go on well enough without Him, hence we don't have the zeal to work hard and that is why we do not attain Him. When an aspirant makes efforts with intense longing, as well as faith in the words of the guru and the scriptures, he certainly attains Him.

Yearning and Grace

The Master had said earlier: 'That is why I say work is necessary.' Mahimacharan asked, 'By what kind of work can one realize God?' The Master replied: 'It is not that God can be

realized by this work and not by that. The vision of God depends on His grace. Still a man must work a little with longing for God in his heart. If he has longing he will receive the grace of God.'

In this regard the advice of the Holy Mother is worth remembering. A devotee once asked her, 'Mother, does japa work?' That is, can one have God's vision by repeating His name? The Mother said, 'No, my child.' 'Does meditation work?' 'No.' 'Then what works, Mother?' 'Only His grace, my child.' Without His grace, work alone cannot enable us to realize God. He is so difficult to fathom that we do not have the competence even to perform the proper sādhanā to reach Him. No matter how intense our sādhanā is, it is insignificant so far as attaining Him is concerned. Pride of sādhanā cannot arise in our minds if we are conscious of this. Pride of sādhanā is indeed most dangerous. 'I do so much japa, I meditate for so long'—this sense of pride is in vain. That is why it is said that only His grace works. If one has longing one shall receive the grace of God. Therefore, one must continue to do something with intense longing. When one has this longing the Lord will arrange everything: '...the company of holy men, discrimination, and the blessings of a real teacher.' Perhaps, the aspirant's elder brother takes the responsibility for the family; perhaps his wife has spiritual qualities and is very virtuous; perhaps he is not married at all or entangled in worldly life. He succeeds when conditions like these are fulfilled.' In other words if an aspirant sincerely calls on God, He makes everything favourable for him. If one yearns for Him and surrenders to Him, all his obstacles will be removed. In this context the Master narrated a wonderful tale. 'In a certain family a man lay seriously ill and was about to die. Someone said: "Here is a remedy: First it must rain when the star Svāti is in the ascendant; then some of that rain-water must collect in a human skull; then a frog must come there and a snake must chase it; and as the frog is about to be bitten by the snake, it must jump away and the poison of the snake must drop into

the skull. You must prepare a medicine from this poison and give it to the patient. Then he will live." The head of the family consulted the almanac about the star and set out at the right moment. With great longing of heart he began to search for the different ingredients and prayed to God. As he was roaming about he actually saw a skull lying on the ground. Presently there came a shower of rain. What is more, some of the rain had fallen into the skull. He was reflecting with a yearning heart when he saw a poisonous snake approaching. His joy knew no bounds. He became so excited that he could not feel the thumping of his own heart and kept praying to God. Presently a frog hopped up. The snake pursued it. As they came near the skull and the snake was about to bite the frog, the frog jumped over the skull and the snake's poison fell into it. Everything is made favourable if there is sincere longing. The Master concluded by saying, 'So I say that one gets everything through yearning.' His grace comes regardless of any consideration. And if somebody approaches Him with sincere yearning He never disappoints him. The Master drove home the point elsewhere by another illustration: 'So long as the child remains engrossed with its toys, the mother looks after her household duties. But when the child yells for its mother throwing aside the toys, the mother takes the rice-pot off the stove, runs in haste, and takes the child in her arms.'

REFERENCES

1. *Nāso ramana hām na ramanī,
duhu mana manobhava peshala jāni.*
— *Chaitanya Charitāmrita, Madhyalilā, 8.194*
2. *Yo vā idam kaśchid bruyād veda vedeti
yathā vettha tathā bruhīti.*
— *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad, 3.7.1*

3. *Bhaktih pareśānubhavo viraktir
anyatra chaisha trika ekakālah,
Prapadyamānasya yathāśnata syustusthih
pushtih kshudapayo'nughāsam.*
—*Bhāgavatm*, 11.2.42
4. *Yanmansā na manute yenāhurmano matam...*
— *Kena Upanishad*, 1.6
5. *Manasaivedamāptavyam...*
— *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.11
6. *Naishā tarkena matirāpaneyā...*
— *Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.9
7. *Na medhayā na bahunā śrutena...*
— *Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.23
8. *Yā prītiravivekānam vishayeshvanapāyini,
Tvānusmaratah sā me hridayānmāpasarpatu.*
—*Vishnu Purāna*, 1.20.19

CHAPTER 33

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

Renunciation: Its True Significance

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the devotees about renunciation. Apparently he had different ideals for monks and householders. In the case of monks he said: 'A man cannot realize God unless he renounces everything. A sādhu cannot lay things up. "Birds and wandering monks do not make provisions for the morrow."' Referring to himself he said: 'I can't carry anything with me, neither food, nor betel-leaf; I can't even carry a little clay in my hand.' This is the attitude of total renunciation. Next he directed his attention towards Mahimacharan and other householder devotees: 'You are a householder. Therefore you should hold both to "this" and to "that"—both to the world and to God.' He had earlier referred to the same attitude in a different context: 'Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold on to God. If you hold on to the pole, you have no fear of falling down.' This difference in advice merits our attention. Are these mere words of consolation to householders? Is God-realization really possible living in the world? Or, can a man live in the world if his mind is directed to God? In fact, Mahimacharan expressed the same doubt: 'Sir, can one who holds to "that" also hold to "this"?'

These are not mere words of consolation. The Master never uttered a single misleading word; he always uttered the truth. Then what is the significance of his statement in the present context? The Master at first jokingly replied: 'Once,

sitting on the bank of the Ganges near the Panchavati, holding a rupee in one hand and clay in the other, I discriminated, "The rupee is the clay—the clay is verily the rupee, and the rupee is verily the clay", and then threw the rupee into the river. But I was a little frightened thinking that I may have offended the goddess of fortune. I thought, "What shall I do if She doesn't provide me with food any more?" Then, like Hazra, I sought help in a ruse. I said to the goddess, "Mother, may you dwell in my heart." Through these words, seemingly uttered as a joke, he wanted to impress upon us that it is extremely difficult to renounce everything in the very beginning. So long as one identifies himself with the body it is impossible to renounce everything.

In this regard there is a witty yet deeply significant remark of Swami Saradananda, one of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Once a devotee told him at the Udbodhan house that he intended to renounce the world. The Swami replied jokingly: 'Look, my child, I have not been able to renounce this world yet. Don't you see all these clothes?' Saying this, he pointed to the clothes he had put on. It was winter, and owing to his rheumatism, he had put on a number of clothes. But what he really meant was this: So long as one has a body, and it is being made use of, it is not possible to renounce the world fully. That is why the Master said: 'You should renounce mentally. Live the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment.' These are not mere evasive words. Rather, they show the necessity for *sādhana*. He further explained: 'When the mind is freed from "woman and gold", it can be directed to God and become absorbed in Him. It is the bound alone who can be freed. The moment the mind turns away from God, it is bound. When does the lower needle of a pair of scales move away from the upper one? When one pan is pressed down by a weight. "Woman and gold" is the weight.' The idea is—where can you go away from the world? So long as there is a body there is the world as well. Whether a *sannyāsī* or a householder, all have to maintain the body. This is because just as

anyone who wants to perform sādhanā needs a body, the perfected saint also needs it for doing good to people.

Thus, one cannot neglect the body. And as it is not possible to neglect the body, one becomes very much involved in the world. Even a sannyāsī has to beg for his living and find a suitable dwelling place.

Many people want to renounce worldly life at the slightest disappointment or when they begin to feel a little drawn towards God. But where can they go? One finds samsāra wherever one goes. Swamiji has expressed the same feeling in his poem:

Far far, however far you may travel.
 Mounted on the brilliant mental car,
 'Tis the same ocean of Samsār,
 Happiness and misery whirling on.

So the path does not lie in renouncing the external world. It lies in giving up attachment to the world. Therefore it is said that while living in the world the mind should be ever directed towards God like the needle of a pair of scales. Attachment does not find any place in a mind that rests in God. Referring to a popular saying, the Master said: 'Why does a child cry on coming out of its mother's womb? With its cry it says, as it were: "Just see where I am now! In my mother's womb I was meditating on the Lotus Feet of God; but see where I am now!"' So the Master said that it is not necessary for householders to renounce the world externally. They should renounce mentally.

For a sannyāsī also the main thing is to renounce mentally, but in his case external renunciation is also necessary because he has to establish the ideal of renunciation and ensure that he can apply it in his own life. Apparently, therefore, there are differences in the teachings to the two types of aspirants. Does this mean that a sannyāsī does not live in the world? Will he have no connection with the world? If there is any connection, then what does he do? Certainly he has to live

a detached life. He should cultivate a detached outlook towards everything in this world. Everybody should bear this in mind—be he a householder or a sannyāsī, this advice is meant for both of them. So long as a sannyāsī identifies himself with the body he is not free, despite having renounced the world externally. Whether a monk or a householder, one has to perform sādhanā to be able to give up this identification with the body.

The Dialogue Between Rāma and Vaśishtha

We can arrive at some sort of conclusion about the nature of this world with the help of information gained through education. But when the idea becomes deep rooted in the mind that this world is worthless and insignificant, then the world ceases to attract us. However, the world will remain, and it is impossible for anyone to totally give it up. Narrating the tale of Sri Rāmachandra and Vaśishtha, Sri Ramakrishna once again stressed this idea. 'At one time Rāma was overpowered by the spirit of renunciation. Daśaratha, worried at this, went to the sage Vaśishtha, and begged him to persuade Rāma not to give up the world.' Their conversation is recorded in detail in the *Yogavāśishtha Rāmāyana*. Of course, the ultimate non-dualistic principle is stressed in this work. It is stated that this world, this creation—everything—is unreal. It is like the horns of a hare, or like a castle in the air. So, if the world itself is not real, the question of renouncing it does not arise. Renunciation is possible only in the case of a real object and not of something unreal. But in the present story the Master did not cite that argument. Instead he dwelt on another argument of Vaśishtha. Vaśishtha asked: "First of all, reason with me, Rāma; then you may leave the world. May I ask you if this world is outside God?" Rāma found that it is God alone who has become the universe and all its living beings. Everything in the world appears real on account of God's reality behind it. Thereupon Rāma became silent.' It is indeed a special teaching of the

Master, which he repeats time and again—that the Supreme Brahman has become the universe, the living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. ‘There is no being, moving or unmoving, which can exist without Me.’¹

If He alone exists everywhere then where is the need to renounce the world? The question of renouncing the world comes only if it takes our mind away from God. But if God is seen as immanent in everything in this world, then how does the question of giving it up arise? That is why even though the Master taught a select few to renounce the world, he never advised everybody to do so. He advised most people to be firmly established in the truth that He pervades everything in this world. Nothing exists in this world apart from Brahman. The same principle is stated in the scriptures: ‘The entire creation is pervaded by Brahman. Nothing exists other than It.’² So what do we give up? The question of giving up God does not arise at all. But the question arises in the mind of one who feels that this world draws his mind away from God. But the problem cannot be solved by abandoning the world. It can only be done by giving up attachment to it. That is why the Master said: Live in this world without attachment. Who says that the world is filled with objects of sense enjoyment? Who says that this world will divert your mind from God? If you find that God is everywhere, then how can you be diverted from Him? One has to understand that it is God that permeates everything. Then the question of abandoning the world will not arise at all. The Master gave the same piece of advice in a different way at another time: ‘Is it only this? Does God exist only when the eyes are closed, and cease to exist when the eyes are opened?’

We find that the Master gave only that advice which suited a particular aspirant. He never claimed that a sannyāsi was superior to a householder. Both of them are capable of attaining God. Elaborating this Swamiji states that he is great who has attained perfection in his own ideal. It is not proper to judge a person according to another’s ideal. However, Swamiji

has also said that, from one standpoint, the life of an all-renouncing monk is superior. That is, the monk has consciously accepted the ideal of renunciation and has abandoned the conventional path of the world. He is pursuing a different path—the path of renunciation. Thus he tries to establish the ideal of renunciation through his own life. While saying this, Swamiji also adds a few words of caution. It is good to have faith in the ideal of renunciation, but it should not become blind faith. Not everybody should follow this path. How such blind acceptance of a path had bred baneful results was well seen in the Buddhistic age.

Two Paths: Householder's Life and Monastic Life

We should keep in mind that even for a householder a grand path exists that leads to God. The study of the scriptures reveals that it is God Himself who has devised two ways to reach Him. At the beginning of creation Brahmā created four rishis—Sanaka, Sanātana, Sanandana, and Sanatkumāra and asked them, 'Go, and populate the world.' But they did not agree and said, 'What shall we do with descendants? They will make this world a place for sense enjoyment. But why do we need it? This Ātman is our abode. We have no need of any object for sense enjoyment.' Thus, failing to perpetuate the creation through them, Brahmā created the prajāpatis (the original progenitors) and told them: 'Go and populate the world.' Following Brahmā's instruction, they continued the process of creation. Thus it appears that since the beginning of creation two ideals have run parallel—one of the sannyāsīs and the other of the householders. But it is necessary that both groups should have dispassion, intense longing, and firm faith in God. If anyone has faith that the impossible becomes possible through His grace, and if one prays with intense longing and goes on depending on Him under all circumstances, the Lord will remove all difficulties from his path. No matter how serious the obstacles are, they will disappear when we take

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refuge in Him. We do not make any effort, nor do we even intend to do so, but we go on blaming the circumstances. If we really want Him with single-minded devotion, and if we take refuge in Him, then all our obstacles will disappear. One has to surrender to God with faith in Him and with sincere longing.

Solitude and Surrender

Many times we wonder if it is really possible to lead a householder's life while holding on to Him. Suppose the mind is directed to Him with great effort, but such adverse circumstances come that they make it impossible to keep our mind on Him. Sri Ramakrishna knew all these difficulties, so he said in the very beginning: 'In the world a man must fight against passions like lust and anger, against many desires, against attachment. It is convenient to fight from inside a fort—from his own home.' To keep one's mind on God while leading a householder's life is like fighting from within a fort. The Lord takes the responsibility of one, and makes the world favourable for him, who totally surrenders to Him. In such a situation the world not only ceases to be an obstacle in the path of God, it also becomes positively helpful for him to attain God. When his mind becomes restless for sense enjoyment, then there is nothing wrong if a householder enjoys for some time. But it would spell doom if the mind feels restless for sense enjoyments having once renounced the world. Where will it go then? Then one does not have any other place to seek protection. So the Master taught us how we should live in this world: 'Live in the world like a cast-off leaf in a gale. Such a leaf is sometimes blown inside a house and sometimes to a rubbish heap. The leaf goes wherever the wind blows—sometimes to a good place and sometimes to a bad.' Now that God has put us in the world, what can we do? Offer everything to Him, and surrender to Him. Then there will not be any difficulty. Then it will be found that He Himself does everything. Indeed it is irrelevant even to ask where and how one should live. What is

necessary is to change our way of thinking. The Upanishad says: 'All this—whatsoever moves on the earth—should be covered by the Lord.'³ Do not look upon this world just as the world, but perceive it as a manifestation of God. Then you will not see anything harmful or impure. Once the Master saw a group of people carousing in a state of drunkenness. Overwhelmed with joy, Sri Ramakrishna passed into samādhi while uttering: 'Ah! Ah! How nice indeed!' The joy of a drunkard reminded him of the bliss of Brahman, because he saw the entire world as the manifestation of Brahman. In the Bible it is said: 'Thou seest evil because thine eyes are evil.' It is impossible to get rid of all the impurities of the world. It would be like the arrangement of the king who wanted to sweep away the entire dirt of the kingdom using broomsticks. Finally the problem was resolved when the king put on a pair of shoes. In the same way, a change in our angle of vision will solve our problem of whether or not we should live in the world. If we see that everything is enveloped by God, then the difference between pure and impure, good and bad, will no longer remain. That is why we find that those things which would appear profane or immoral to us awakened divine inspiration in the mind of the Master.

To realize God, our position in life is not important. What is necessary is that our vision be oriented in the above manner, and that we have unwavering faith that it is the Lord who does everything. Whether one is a householder or a monk, everybody has to perform sādhanā fortified with this faith and attitude. And that sādhanā is to fervently pray that our mind be free from attachment to sense objects. The mind cannot be freed from the attachment to sense pleasure by forcibly keeping it away from enjoying them. It has been said in the *Gītā*: 'The objects recede from an abstinent man, with the exception of the taste (for them). Even the taste of this person falls away after realizing the Absolute.'⁴

It is never possible that all the latent impressions we have inherited over the successive lives and which lie deep in our mind will simply vanish only by our withdrawing from

worldly life. It takes constant practice. But it may be necessary for some to practise while living in the midst of sense objects, while others may do so by withdrawing from sense objects. Each individual will find a particular situation favourable to him.

Disciplines of Tantra

In the Tāntric scriptures the moods (bhāva) of aspirants have been classified into three groups—the divine bhāva (divya), the heroic bhāva (vīra), and the animal bhāva (paśu). The aspirant with strong attachment for sense objects has the animal bhāva (paśu). Paśu means animal. It means the aspirant is possessed of strong animal instincts, i.e., characteristics of an ordinary jīva. The injunction for such an aspirant is to keep away from sense objects. Next is the heroic attitude (vīra). Here the aspirant has some control over his mind. The injunction for him is that even while living amidst sense objects, he should try to keep his mind from being attached to those objects. His test lies in putting up a heroic struggle. Next is the divine attitude (divya). Here the aspirant's mind is completely cleansed of all impure impressions and his nature has become divine. He does not care whether sense objects are near or far from him. This is because his mind is so tuned to a higher rhythm that it is never drawn towards sense objects. Wherever he may live it is all the same.

Of the three attitudes, that which may be good for one is not only improper, but positively harmful to another. If an aspirant having the animal mood takes up the path of the divine mood without understanding its implication, he not only brings disaster to himself, but causes great damage to society as well. Further, an aspirant with the heroic mood should not necessarily surround himself with sense objects all the time. Instead, he should try to keep himself aloof from sense objects while living amidst them; for where indeed can one go leaving this world?

Eliminating Attachment

Let us go back now to our earlier subject. It is clear that as long as we consider ourselves human beings and living entities, we cannot get out of the confines of this world. Therefore, one has to train one's mind, redirect its gaze within and, in the language of the Upanishads, become *āvrittachakṣuḥ* (one who has his sense organs turned within). The Master also said the same thing: 'Turn the mind towards the indwelling Self. Change its course. Then only will you find peace.' It is a mistake to think that if we could only renounce the world all our troubles would be over and our mind would turn inwards. Our mind will turn within only when we are able to eliminate our attachment for sense objects. If this attachment persists, it will certainly keep on opposing while one leads a worldly life, and in the life of renunciation its opposition will further intensify. That is why the Master warned us again and again: 'Why shouldn't one be able to realize God in this world? Where indeed will you go leaving this world? ...Suppose an office clerk has been sent to jail. When he is released from jail, does he cut capers in the street? Not at all. He gets a job as a clerk again and goes on working as before.' If a worldly person becomes liberated while living, he can easily live the householder's life if he likes. One who has attained knowledge does not differentiate between 'this place' and 'that place'. All places are the same to him. He who sees the supreme Truth (Brahman) in everything will not be adversely affected wherever he may be. Despite the inherited tendencies that continue to work in such an aspirant, no object or action can bind him, because he has realized the supreme Truth and his attachment for sense objects is totally gone. The Master said in this connection: 'The tadpole, so long as it has not dropped its tail, lives only in the water. It cannot move about on dry land. But as soon as it drops its tail it hops out on the bank; then it can live both on land and in water. Likewise, as long as a man has not dropped his tail of ignorance, he can live only in the

water of the world. But when he drops his tail, that is to say, when he attains the Knowledge of God, then he can roam about as a free soul, or live as a householder if he likes.' But so long as we do not attain the supreme Truth, we have to struggle hard no matter where we are. That is why the Master said: 'You are leading a householder's life. That is very good. It is like fighting from a fort.' This is because if we lose a couple of times while fighting, we can always get up and fight again. But if we lose the fight after having renounced the world, then it would be disastrous because we are aspiring to attain an ideal that does not offer any scope for compromise. So if that ideal is degraded it would be bad for us as well as for society. Therefore, we have to be very careful before we set our foot in this direction.

Now the question may arise, which path is suitable for us? The answer has been given in the scriptures and by saints having divine insight. They say that if we find that we have very intense renunciation—the expression 'very intense' should be specially borne in mind—then we can renounce the world. But if our detachment is not intense, if there is still indecision about what to do, then it is better that we stay where we are. One may continue one's *sādhana* there itself. If an unworthy aspirant embraces *sannyāsa*, he will be unable to maintain it. Thus, the ideal would be maligned by him individually, and it would be degraded at the collective level also, which would not be good for society. Therefore, Swamiji, though an ardent admirer of Buddha, said that by the indiscriminate propagation of the ideal of *sannyāsa* Buddhism did great harm to society.

Two Āśramas

No matter what ideal we may choose, essentially we all are moving towards God alone. It is often found that there are many amongst the householders who have great dispassion. And there are aspirants pursuing the life of renunciation who

are unable to follow that path with the required zeal and sincerity. So the question that naturally arises is—why is the *sannyāsi* given special honour? It is because a *sannyāsi* has chosen a great ideal, whereas a householder follows the age-old conventional way of life. He has not selected any special path of his own. He has remained where he was born and brought up. There is nothing extraordinary about it. If, however, a householder considers his household to be a spiritual stage of life (*āśrama*) and himself as a follower of that stage (*āśramī*) then the idea of blindly following a time-worn tradition goes away. In our scriptures also all the four stages of life—the celibate stage (*brahmacharya*), the householder's stage (*gārhasthya*), the stage of retirement from household life (*vānaprastha*), and the stage of renunciation (*sannyāsa*) are held in equal esteem. They say that the life of a person who does not follow any of the four stages (*anāśramī*), is futile. Everyone has to follow any one or more of these stages of life, so how does the question of failure arise? It can be answered thus: the efforts of an aspirant are indeed proper, if he takes up a stage not just blindly following the time-worn tradition, but regards it as a means of his spiritual progress and successfully discharges all the duties pertaining to it for the attainment of God. The celibate life (*brahmacharya*) is preparatory to all the other stages. Here the aspirant prepares himself to follow the subsequent stages of life. If he likes he may follow all the three stages successively. But if he is seized with the ideal of intense renunciation, then he may at once set out for the attainment of God, giving up everything. This has been stated in our scriptures: 'One has to renounce immediately the moment one has dispassion.'⁵ In fact, this renunciation should be very intense. There is no scope for any escapism. The sense of dispassion should be so intense that this world must be considered to be a deep well, and that one would die the moment he falls into it.

When an aspirant is seized with such intense renunciation that he will not allow his mind to waste time

contemplating any other object except God, then alone will his renunciation be natural and genuine. But if his renunciation is not that intense, the help of the householder's life is needed. If the household can be transformed into a religious one, it will help sādhanā. That is why the Master taught both ideals. The purpose of both is the same—God-realization. The paths, however, are different depending upon the nature of the aspirant. If one can make oneself a householder like Nag Mahashaya, then what is wrong in leading such a life? Or if by renouncing the world one can become like Swamiji or any other great saint, then what is the need of this worldly life? So the Master taught each person the path that suited him or her most. However, he never struck any compromise, and it would be a mistake to think that he gave false assurances to householders.

Different Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna

Appreciative of different mental attitudes, Sri Ramakrishna was opposed to impinging on the mental attitude of others. So, while teaching his future monastic disciples, the Master was extremely cautious so as not to be heard by others. Was he being partial? No, certainly not. He knew that his young disciples could march ahead without resorting to worldly life. So in order to wipe out completely even the slightest trace of weakness they might have had for this life, he depicted before them the most terrible, gruesome picture of worldly life. At the same time he taught in most glowing terms the ideal of renunciation. Now suppose those for whom the householders' life was most suited heard him speak about the ideals of intense renunciation. They would then have serious doubts; so Sri Ramakrishna was very cautious. It should be remembered that if a person does not have faith in his own stage of life, he can never hope to advance. So a householder should bear in mind that this world is not insignificant; rather, it is a means to reach God. Many householders have the tendency to belittle their

own way of life, which is not correct. That is not the Master's idea. *Samsarati iti samsārah*—that is, anybody who passes through this cycle of birth and death is a *samsārī* (worldly soul). Viewed from this perspective, who is not a *samsārī*? So the Master taught that each person must move forward to realize God from wherever he or she might be.

Just as we find some apparent contradictions between the Master's teachings to the householders and to the monastics, though both are equally true, we find yet another area where his teachings appear to be contradictory. That is when the Master spoke about the Supreme Truth. He said different things at different times. At one time he said, 'He is One, non-dual, beyond mind and speech.' At another time he said: 'Do you know what I see right now? I see that it is God Himself who has become all this. ... I saw houses, gardens, roads, men, cattle—all made of One Substance; it was as if they were all made of wax.' Another time he said: 'Not I, not I, but Thou, Thou.' Again on another occasion he said: 'I am He'. In fact, we come across many such apparently contradictory statements in our scriptures. But we will not find any contradiction when we examine them in their proper context. The variations in advice are all true, because the aspirants in their Godward journey have to pass through various experiences. The Master personally followed many different spiritual practices. And he personally experienced all those states in his life. Those ideals which appear contradictory to us were only disciplines he taught to different aspirants. The Master was an Advaitin, Dvaitin, and Viśistādvaitin, all rolled in one. He knew that each philosophy was true and was suitable for different people. 'In my Father's house are many mansions.'⁶ He passed through all the different stages of spiritual discipline and taught a particular path which would be easy for a particular individual. On different occasions he gave different instructions to different people, and the *Gospel* is the collection of all his teachings. This is why we may wonder about the contradictions in his teachings.

The Master even discussed paths which were considered despicable by society. Once he said, 'This is also a way to God.' He not only spoke about such paths, he even practised those, at least partially. But he simultaneously cautioned the devotees that these paths were very dangerous. If many people were to follow these paths it would harm society. Despite having criticized these paths, he respected those who tried to reach God through them. By observing the diverse practices and rituals of different groups, and accepting many apparently contradictory views, the Master personally realized the ultimate truth abiding in each of them. This accounts for the differences in the Master's teachings.

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— *Gītā*, 10.39
2. *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma...*
— *Chāndogya Upanishad*, 3.14.1
3. *Īśāvāsyam idam sarvam...*
— *Īśā Upanishad*, 1
4. *Vishayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinah,
Rasavarjam raso'pyasya paramdrishtvā nivartate.*
— *Gītā*, 2.59
5. *Yadahareva virajettadahareva pravrajat.*
— *Jābāla Upanishad*, 4
6. *Bible*, St. John, 14.2

CHAPTER 34

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

The Views of Keshab and Dayananda

In the previous chapter [of the *Gospel*] the Master, while speaking about Keshab, said: 'He is the only one who has dropped his tail.' That is, 'as long as a man has not dropped his tail of ignorance, he can live only in the water of the world. But when he drops his tail, that is to say, when he attains the Knowledge of God, then he can roam about as a free soul, or live as a householder.'

Next he spoke about two other householder devotees—Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and 'Captain' Vishwanath Upadhyaya. Earlier, M. had mentioned some of the comments of Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Keshab Sen about the Master. M. said that the Master was not a pundit in the literal sense. Nonetheless, celebrated pundits who were masters of the scriptures such as Padmalochan, Narayana Shastri, Gouri Pandit, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and others were awe-struck, hearing the Master's words while seated at his feet. After seeing the Master, Swami Dayananda said: 'Scholars churn the scriptures only to drink the buttermilk, while great souls like him eat the whole of its butter.' Dayananda was a follower of the Vedas, a great Vedic scholar, but he was opposed to the conventional interpretation of the Vedas. He was highly impressed by the Master's spiritual state and said: 'We have only read the Vedas and Vedānta, but here we see that he [Sri Ramakrishna] has

realized their essence.' Keshab was learned in both Western and Eastern philosophies; over and above that he was a great admirer of the Bible. He was specially influenced by the personality of Jesus Christ. He said that Sri Ramakrishna's words were similar to those of Jesus Christ. Like Christ, the Master presented spiritual truths to all in simple language. Just as Jesus was totally absorbed in God and all-renouncing, so was the Master. And even as Jesus had deep faith in God, the Master too had burning faith in God. The Jews used to say: 'For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'¹ Keshab Sen also spoke about the brilliance of the Master's words: 'How could this unlettered man be so broad-minded?' He had no quarrel with anybody, nor did he bear any malice towards others. He loved the followers of all faiths with equal warmth.

All the celebrated religious leaders and the learned and talented personalities of those days met the Master. Either they came to the Master or he personally went to see them. Perhaps there is a deep mystery in this. As an instrument of the Divine Mother he wanted to meet these personalities to infuse in them a new ideology, but he also wanted to acquaint himself with the various views that existed in those days.

About Maharshi the Master observed: 'I found that Devendra had combined both yoga and bhoga in his life.' From the Master's words we get the impression that despite being worthy enough, Maharshi could not advance much towards God because he was far too preoccupied with this world. Yet in spite of his association with the world, he did not forget God. Devendranath was impressed by Sri Ramakrishna and showed him due respect, but he was so deeply entrenched in social etiquette that he forbade the Master from going to the Brāhmo Samāj lest the members of the Samāj laugh at him and say that he was 'uncultured'. Even though he respected the Master, he could not fully accept him. Though he had great knowledge of the scriptures and respected Hindu ideals, he wanted to reform the Hindu religion and establish a new

religious community for the upper class and people with refined tastes.

How Keshab Changed

No doubt Devendranath's ideas found a reflection in Keshab. From the historical perspective this point deserves special attention. After Keshab had come in contact with the Master, a significant change was noticed in Keshab and the Brāhmo religion he headed. Keshab's devotion and absorption in God, his scholarship and oratory, brought him fame in the West, and captivated Westerners, specially Max Müller. But Max Müller observed that Keshab, who had become famous as an ardent religious reformer, slowly showed signs of drifting away from this ideal as days passed. It seemed that Keshab was getting more and more attracted towards the path of devotion which influenced the Hindu ideals. But when Max Müller tried to analyse the reasons for Keshab's Harinām-sankirtan (devotional group singing) and his prayerful invoking of the Divine Mother's name, he discovered that the influence of Sri Ramakrishna was the main reason. He then became curious to know about Sri Ramakrishna. After he met Swami Vivekananda his curiosity was intensified further, because he felt that if the disciple was so great and noble, how much more would the Master be. Swami Vivekananda held Max Müller in great esteem because of his work of retrieving the Vedas which had almost been lost. As desired by Max Müller, Swamiji secured for him the necessary material from India on the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Based on this material, Max Müller wrote a biography of Sri Ramakrishna, which proved to be very helpful in spreading the Master's ideas in the West. In this way the Master would transmit his broad ideas—directly or indirectly—to the bearers of his special message. Moreover, influencing them by his exalted spiritual state he would guide them towards the ideal which would help them develop themselves.

The Absence of Ego in the Master

Not only Keshab, but other Brāhmo devotees also were slowly influenced by the Master. And aspirants of other faiths also gave up their narrow outlook after they came in contact with him. Thus, it appears that the Divine Mother used him as an instrument in influencing others to create a new thought current all over the world. Of course, we know that in this case the instrument and the operator were not different. But even so we refer to him as the instrument because he was completely indifferent to the fact that he was bringing about a glorious revolution in this world. He was hardly ever aware of his overwhelming personality. His 'I' was completely effaced, and the Divine Mother alone prevailed. This is why he could initiate such a tremendous spiritual revolution and bring about the beginning of a new millennium. When the Master asked M. how much ego he had in him, M. replied that he had kept only a little of it for the good of the world. Immediately the Master corrected M. saying that it was not he who had retained the ego, but the Mother Herself had kept it in him. This is why the author of *The Great Master* said that each and every action of the Master was meant for the good of the world. His life was not meant for any need of his own, but the world needed it. All his actions, whether small or big, were for the good of the world.

Vishwanath Upadhyaya

After speaking about Devendranath, the Master mentioned 'Captain': 'There is another big man: Vishwanath Upadhyaya or 'Captain', staying in Calcutta as the King of Nepal's representative.' He was a special type of person and a noble soul. He was a householder who followed orthodox traditions, a great devotee, an orthodox brahmin, and a great lover of God. Though Sri Ramakrishna was not that particular about social conventions, Captain had the deepest regard for

him. The Master greatly loved Captain, but the flaws in the latter's character did not escape his notice. No doubt Captain was very much devoted to God, but he attached so much importance to rituals and conventions that he failed to realize that love for God was much higher than all these. According to him, 'Keshab had violated the social conventions: he dined with the English, had married his daughter into another caste.' That is why Captain did not like the Master's intimacy with Keshab. So when Captain once raised the topic of their friendship in an accusing tone, the Master answered him rather sharply in order to remove his narrow outlook: 'But I don't go to him for money; I go there to hear the name of God. And how is it that you visit the Viceroy's house? He is a mlechha (foreigner). How can you be in his company?' We do not know whether it brought about any change in Captain, but that silenced him for sometime.

Sri Ramakrishna's Influence and His Uniqueness

With regard to all the great persons discussed above, we find that the Master praised their noble qualities no doubt, but whenever he came across shortcomings in their character he tried to remove them.

When the Master met Dayananda, he understood through his subtle vision that a power was manifested in him and that he was keen to establish a new spiritual order or community. The Master called on Dayananda of his own accord and praised his scholarship and his oratorical abilities. But he did not quite like Dayananda's dogmatism and his efforts to form a separate group. According to the Master, groupism betrays narrow-mindedness and a weakness of the mind. When the mind fails to accept others and is unable to appreciate the good qualities in others it tries to form a separate group. About Maharshi Devendranath he said: '...though he was a jnānī, yet he was preoccupied with worldly life.' That is, he had some attachment for this world. In the case of Keshab the Master

took him by the hand, as it were, and helped him advance step by step. The Master once said to him: 'Say, Bhāgavata-Bhakta-Bhagavān.' Keshab repeated this. But when the Master said, 'Say, Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava', then Keshab declined with folded hands: 'Sir, not that far. My organization and other things will cease to exist then.' In other words, Keshab was still keen to maintain his organization. At his words the Master laughed. He laughed because he had introduced a medicine. He knew the medicine was working and that the disease was being slowly cured. There need not be any hurry now. So he waited and even encouraged Keshab to march ahead following his own ideal.

The Master said to Captain about social reforms: 'Till now you have done much in this matter. Why don't you leave these things aside and direct your mind Godward. Maybe people will say you've become mad. Well, let them say so!' Thus he tried to bring over those who had been side-tracked back to the path of progress and change their outlook. By exemplifying a superhuman ideal, by his supreme love and affection, and his limitless magnanimity, he captivated people and helped them progress in their own paths. But what is that true path? The path lies in loving God and realizing Him. To what religion one belonged was of no consequence. He wanted all to go Godward. That is why he extended his loving invitation to the followers of all faiths: 'Though you may pursue different paths, all of you shall finally reach the same destination. So be firm about your own goal and sincerely move forward.'

It is not that the Master was the first to announce this truth: it is an ancient principle. The Vedas declare: 'Truth is one; sages call it by various names.'² Jesus Christ also says that the destination is one, though there are several entrances leading to it. But the statement of the Master has its special merit, because he declared it on the basis of his own realization. There is no one either before Sri Ramakrishna, or even now, who has personally practised all the different paths and ultimately realized the supreme Truth through all of

them. This example of realizing the supreme Truth in one's life by practising almost all the prevalent faiths is unique in this world, and that is why, like needles drawn towards a magnet, many noble and great personalities were deeply influenced by their contact with the Master. And the influence that inspired these great personalities then, is spreading far and wide with the passing of time. The Master's ideas are even now spreading in different countries, and their main attraction is their catholicity and absence of narrowness. The unique features of his ideas are indeed worth studying. In modern times those who are genuinely religious have found the reflection of their own ideals in those of the Master. He also said, 'whoever has sincerely called on God even once will certainly come here.' This is coming true. That is why we find that any aspirant sincerely in search of God, no matter what faith he or she follows, cannot but feel the attraction for the Master's liberal views, or be moved by their irresistible sway.

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2. *Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti.*

—*Rig Veda*, 1.164.46

CHAPTER 35

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

The Parable of a Jnānī Farmer

Earlier the Master had said that 'in the light of Vedāntic reasoning the world is illusory and unreal like a dream.' One who is the supreme Soul is the Witness—the witness to the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. In this context the Master told Mahimacharan the parable of a farmer who had attained Knowledge. The farmer did not mourn the death of his only son, Haru. He told his wife, '...I had a vivid dream last night. I dreamt I had become a king; I was the father of eight sons and was very happy with them. Then I woke up. Now I am greatly perplexed. Should I weep for those eight sons or for this one Haru?' That is to say, to him there was no difference between the state of waking and that of dream. Both were the same. The reason for not seeing any difference among the three states is due to the experience of yet another state beyond these, which is called *turiya* (the fourth state). Seen from the state of *turiya*, the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep appear to be illusory—as if those three states are states of ignorance. So in the state of *turiya* the mind does not feel any longing for this illusory world, nor does its perception make the mind restless. That is why the Master said: 'The farmer was a *jnānī*; therefore he realized that the waking state is as unreal as the dream state. There is only one eternal Substance, and that is the *Ātman*.'

The Three States

It is very difficult for us to conceive of such an experience because we are habituated to accepting the waking state as true. And we want to hold on to it. We experience dreams, but the moment a dream breaks we feel everything in the dream was unreal. But it becomes next to impossible for us to accept that the waking state is as unreal as a dream. This is quite natural. The reason is that the dream state is refuted, or proved unreal when we wake up. But there is no other state which can disprove the waking state. Though both the states of waking and dream are gone in the state of deep sleep, it does not prove thereby their falsity. Lack of perception of these states and their falsity are not synonymous. For example, if there is a wall before us we are unable to see things beyond, but our inability to see the objects beyond the wall does not prove the falsity of the objects. The wall obstructs our view. Likewise, in the state of deep sleep we fail to perceive anything, as our sense organs become inactive. If I close my eyes, does the world immediately dissolve? No, it does not. The world certainly becomes invisible to the viewer, but it is not proved false.

In order to disprove something, it is necessary to view it from a higher plane. A dream is proved false in the waking state. In Vedānta, at least in some contexts, the dream state is considered a 'rebuttal' to the state of waking, e.g., in the Ajātavāda of the Gaudapāda-Kārikā. But everyone, including Śāṅkarācārya, has in general accepted the relative existence of the world. The relative existence of the world is experienced through our interactions. And in a dream it is experienced as inferior, where it lacks the coherence of the waking state. In the dream state the sense of time, the coherent arrangement of objects, and the cause-effect relationships are not distinctly present. That is why we say that a dream is unreal. It is like this: we may dream we have gone to Delhi or to places even further, while the body remains where it has been. Then after waking we say: 'I've dreamt that I've been to Delhi.'

There are many different opinions about dreams and many superstitions are associated with it. Some people say that in the dream state the soul within us moves out of the body, as if it travels to Delhi and comes back. But there are several reasons why this cannot be true. For instance, suppose I dream that my body has changed. When I wake up I find that no change has taken place in my body. It is indeed what it has been. There are such inconsistencies and discrepancies in the dream state, and so we call it unreal. Sometimes we dream that we have passed through several ages, but when we wake we find that we have hardly slept five minutes. This kind of experience is a strong argument for proving the falsity of dreams, because they totally lack any consistency as regards time, space, the succession of events, and the cause-effect relationship. When we wake up from sleep we say that our dream is unreal. But while one is dreaming, no such judgement is possible. Sometimes we feel that our dream is a dream—we are dreaming within our dream, but that also is part of the dream and defies any judgement. After waking up we judge a dream from our waking experience. Observing the absence of consistency and the logical succession of events, we imagine that our dream is false. Unless it were false, how could I tour Delhi in such a short time and experience an event of such a long duration within such a short time? So it is unreal. The time, the places, the people in the dream are all false. That our dream is unreal and illusory is proved at each and every step.

Dreams are unreal, but this experience of dreams does not prove that the waking state is equally unreal; at least those who admit the relative existence of the world say so. We experience dreams in the dream state and the waking state while we are awake. The way we compare the two in the waking state cannot be done while dreaming. If we could judge the state of waking while dreaming, then, perhaps, we could doubt which is true—waking or dream. We do not say that both states are similar because we cannot judge the state of waking while we are dreaming. If such a judgement was

possible then both the states could be called similar on account of both of them being unreal. The Ajātavāda theory has not been accepted by the Vedāntins of our country in this form. They say that judging from the Absolute or fourth state the waking state is as much unreal as is the state of dream. That both the states are false can be proved only when one is established in a higher plane, and not before that. Just as the dream state is proved false only after one is established in the waking state, the state of waking will be proved false after one is established in a state beyond that. That state, however, would necessarily be beyond the waking state or be more enduring. From this point of view the Vedāntins claim that there is a still higher plane, or exalted state and when one is established there, the waking state will appear equally illusory or unreal. That plane is beyond the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. Deep sleep is a state where one does not even dream. There are many views about the state of deep sleep. Some say that the state of deep sleep is subject to perception. Some others say it is simply an imagination. For example, I went to sleep at two in the afternoon and when I woke up I found it was three in the afternoon. During that time I did not experience anything. So I imagine that in the state of deep sleep one does not perceive anything. I imagine this because had there been any perception, its memory would have lingered.

The Advaitins say that just as the states of waking and dream are directly perceptible, the state of deep sleep too is perceptible. How does it become directly perceptible? If it is not directly perceptible then just by seeing my watch how do I say that I had no experience, nor any memory of the hour when I was in deep sleep? The Vedāntins ask: How do you know that during that hour you were in deep sleep you did not experience anything? It is indeed difficult to answer that question, but it is understandable that if I had experienced anything I would remember it. There was some experience and yet there is no memory of it; but it will not do simply to say

that there is no memory of it. Then what is the proof that there was some experience during deep sleep? The Vedāntins reply this way: you say you did not experience anything because then you ceased to be the 'doer' in the experience.

In the state of deep sleep a jīva acts as a witness, so it says that it did not experience anything. If it had not been there as a witness then that particular hour would have been lost to it forever; but it does not happen that way. The witness is present in the state of deep sleep, but as its antahkarana (mind) does not function, it cannot retain the memory. Had the witness been absent, who could report that 'I had no experience.'

The Ātman is Beyond All Three States

There are two views regarding deep sleep. Vedānta has concluded that the Ātman is present even in the state of deep sleep. That Ātman is not involved in any of the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. It is beyond these. This is because It experiences all the three states and declares Its experience of them. The One that experiences and also declares Its experience of the three states can do so because it is beyond them. If It were one with the three states, then the Ātman of the waking state would not have been present in the dream state, and likewise the Ātman of the dream state would have been absent in the state of deep sleep. All the three states would remain separate from one another. But since it is not so, and since the same 'I' experiences the states of waking and dream, and again it is that 'I' which experiences the state of deep sleep too, Vedānta concludes that this 'I' is different from all the three states. 'Like the thread that goes through the flowers in a garland is not the flowers but different from them, so that which is encircled by other objects is different from the objects.'

A garland is made from various flowers. Perhaps a yellow flower is next to a red one; likewise a white flower is next to a

yellow flower. In this way varieties of flowers distinct from one another are there, but a common thread runs through all of them. That the thread is present throughout and yet the flowers are different, enables us to understand that the thread is different from the flowers. Following this argument, the 'I' is present in all the variable states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. Therefore, it is to be understood that the 'I' is independent of the three states. This is one of the main arguments of the Vedāntins that it is the 'I' who experiences different objects in the states of waking and dream, and again experiences 'ignorance' in the state of deep sleep. Here 'ignorance' means that one does not perceive objects, but there is the feeling of 'ignorance' of objects. So the 'I' is independent of the three states. The 'I' is a witness, one who expresses ideas.

Thus, through the process of reasoning we come to know about the Ātman, and we conceive of a principle. Yet unless we directly experience the principle we cannot claim to have known it. If we 'know' something through inference, it cannot be said to be direct knowledge or Self-knowledge. We may conceive of a state called the Ātman which is independent of the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep through the process of inference. We say such knowledge is inferential knowledge; it is not direct knowledge.

The Vedāntins, however, ask, do we really know the Ātman which is being inferred? We cannot say that we do not know. Without knowing the Ātman, how could we experience objects? As we experience each individual object, simultaneously we know the Ātman as the knower of the object. Unless we know the 'I' as the knower, we cannot experience any object. So the 'I' exists as the knower of the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. Though we experience the 'I' in this manner, we are unable to realize it as distinct from and independent of the three states. So, *prima facie*, the Ātman is an object of our inference, but we are unable to realize it, or we are unable to attain 'Self-realization'—that is knowledge of the Self in the parlance of Vedānta. Knowledge obtainable through

inference is called 'indirect knowledge'. We tried to know the Ātman through inference, so it became indirect knowledge. It did not become direct knowledge. When we have direct knowledge of the Ātman, then the three states will be proved to be false compared to the real Self. Before that we cannot say that the three states are false. We can say a dream is false after we are established in the waking state. In the same way, if we can ever reason after being established in that Reality which is beyond not only the waking state but all the three states, then only we will experience the waking state also as unreal. When one is established in that transcendental state, reasoning is no longer of any avail, for no dualism persists there. Who then is there to reason?

The Master said in this context: 'The farmer was a jñānī and he realized that the waking state is as unreal as the dream state.' Being established in which state did the farmer say this? In the state of Turiya. The Master said: 'But for my part I accept everything: Turiya and also the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.' There is only one eternal Substance, and that is the Ātman. The state of dream is as unreal as that of waking. Here the state of deep sleep is not mentioned, because the process of reasoning with regard to that state is different. The states of waking, dream, and deep sleep are unreal in comparison to the only one eternal Substance, the Ātman. In the waking state the other two states of dream and deep sleep are absent. Again in the state of deep sleep the states of waking and dream are absent. Likewise in every state the presence of one marks the absence of the others. So they are all unreal. Only the Ātman is real because It is immanent in all the three states. That is why the Master said: '...I accept all three states. I accept all—Brahman and also māyā, the universe, and its living beings. If I accepted less I should not get the full weight.'

Brahman is the principle beyond all the three states. Brahman pervades all, and is the substratum of everything. It is the substratum of all superimpositions. The term 'unreality' does not mean void. Unreality means that the way an object

appears is not what it really is. It is like the rope-snake illustration, where the snake is false because the object seen is not a snake, but a rope. In the same way, this world is false because it is not what it appears to be. It is essentially Brahman. From this standpoint, the Ātman alone is true. Everything else is false. The Master accepted everything; he did not reject the different states of the Ātman. Turiya is a state independent of the three states. The same Ātman is the principle beyond all the three states, the only eternal Substance. By 'state' is meant that which is temporarily associated with the Ātman. But Turiya is not a 'state' like waking, dream, and deep sleep. It is independent and beyond the three states. In that the Ātman always abides. Again, 'I accept all—Brahman and also māyā, the universe, and its living beings.' Under the effect of māyā this universe and the living beings are created. How could He who is One and non-dual become many? Under the influence of māyā! 'Indra has assumed many forms through illusion.'¹ He does not in reality have many forms. But under the influence of illusion He appears to be many.

Advaita and Viśishtādvaita

The Master said, 'I accept His māyā and also His various appearances; I accept the diversity created by māyā as also the non-dual Principle devoid of all diversity.' The Master's attitude is to accept Him in all aspects. 'If I accepted less I should not get the full weight'—this statement sounds like Viśishtādvaita (qualified non-dualism). Is He Consciousness alone and not the insentient as well? Since insentience is present as the object of our experience then He is also that which is insentient. He who is qualified by the sentient is also qualified by the insentient—this is the principle of Viśishtādvaitavāda. So when the Ātman is qualified by the sentient as well as the insentient, then accepting one in exclusion of the other cannot be said to express the total essence of the Ātman.

To say that He is not the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep is to exclude a portion of His. That is why the Master said: 'I accept all.... If I accepted less I should not get the full weight.'

A devotee asked: 'The full weight? How is that?'

The Master then explained the basic principle of Viśishtādvaita in the most simple terms: 'Brahman is qualified by the universe and its living beings. At the beginning, while following the method of "Not this, not this", one has to eliminate the universe and its living beings. But as long as "I-consciousness" remains, one cannot but feel that it is God Himself who has become everything. He alone has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.' Viśishtādvaitins say that Brahman is One, but by His māyā He is capable of expressing Himself as many. It is like a tree—a tree is made up of branches, flowers, fruits—everything. The tree exists in its trunk as much as in its fruits, flowers, and leaves. Thus, Brahman as qualified by the waking state and Brahman as qualified by the states of dream and deep sleep—all these make up our experience of Brahman in Its totality. So the weight falls short when one state is considered in exclusion of the others.

But Vedāntins argue: If excluding these makes the weight less, then does excluding the illusory snake from the rope-snake reduce its weight? When I find that the rope is not a snake, does that mean the rope weighs less? In the same way will Brahman suffer depletion if we exclude the universe and its living beings? In reality they do not exist, so they are said to be unreal. That is why that which does not exist in reality but is experienced, such as the snake, is called unreal. Likewise, the universe does not exist in reality as the universe. Nonetheless it appears as the universe, and that is why it is said to be 'unreal'. It does not mean that it is void. Brahman alone exists. It is but Brahman which we call the universe. A tree trunk appears to be a man from a distance, but approaching it we find that it is a tree trunk. When we experience this then that

unreal, or that falsity which had been superimposed, disappears, and whatever remains is the reality. So the Vedāntins say the weight does not fall short.

The Master's Analysis and Judgement

The Master realized the Truth in Its various aspects, and thus said: 'If I accepted less I should not get the full weight.' The Master had said earlier: 'Why should I accept Advaita only and become one-sided?' He enjoyed his realization in various ways—as non-dual and in its varied forms. The Master further said: '...I enjoy my fish in a variety of dishes: curried fish, fried fish, pickled fish, and so forth!' He said that he tasted the Reality through the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, and also Turiya—though the word 'taste' is inappropriate here. While following the method of 'Not this, not this', one has to eliminate the universe and the living beings. Without this 'Not this, not this' process of reasoning, one cannot reach the non-dual Principle. Thus, when we reach that non-dual Principle, Brahman, by negating the universe and the living beings, and when nothing is left to reject further, then we attain the knowledge of the One substance devoid of all attributes. Coming down from this state the aspirant realizes, 'Lo! That which I thought was One, It indeed is many.' He experiences the One in the many. He has become everything, the twenty-four cosmic principles. 'When a man speaks of the essential part of the bel-fruit, he means its flesh only, and not the seeds and shell. But if he wants to speak of the total weight of the fruit, it will not do for him to weigh only the flesh. He must accept the whole thing: seeds and shell and flesh. That is why, the Master says: 'Seeds and shell and flesh belong to one and the same fruit. The Nitya and the Līlā belong to the same Reality.'

He who in His absolute form is the immutable, non-dual Principle, appears in His Līlā (divine sport) as many. It is described as Līlā because He has become many for sport. By

His inconceivable power He has assumed varied forms despite being One. 'I am One, let me be many', He thought.' What is the purpose? Nothing, indeed! Līlā means activity without any motive. Through the influence of māyā, the ultimate Principle has manifested Himself in various forms as a sport. It is called māyā because He can manifest diversity where there is nothing at all. It is like a magician who performs magic tricks. He produces a mango-tree which bears mangoes, and feeds them to the people. Later, however, one finds that nothing is there. This is all sleight of hand. God is that great magician. He has captivated the entire creation through His magic spell. He creates the universe by His power of māyā and enjoys it in its varied forms. Who is it that enjoys the creation in its varied forms? It is He alone—in various forms, in the form of the creation and in the form of the seed. He is the insentient and also the Consciousness which experiences this insentient. He is One and He is many. He is God, and He is the universe and the living beings. Thus, He is realized in everything. The Master said several times: 'The Nitya and the Līlā belong to the same Reality.' From the relative to the Absolute and from the Absolute to the relative. He said further: 'But the king's son has access to all the seven floors; who's going to stop him? He moves from the Nitya to the Līlā and from the Līlā to the Nitya. He has nothing to fear anywhere.'

The Vedāntins speak of this state of fearlessness. When a Vedāntin looks at this world he has no fear of bondage, because in his view this world has no reality. It is like a figment of his imagination. That which appears as the universe is nothing but Brahman to the Advaitin. He who is established in supreme Knowledge fails to be charmed by the diversity in the universe. The illusory spell of Mahāmāyā fails to delude him. He has reached the supreme Reality piercing through the veil of illusion. That is why the Master said: 'Therefore I accept everything, the Relative as well as the Absolute. I don't explain away the world as māyā. Were I to do that I should get short weight.'

REFERENCE

1. *Indro māyābhīḥ pururupa īyate ...*—*Rig Veda*, 6.47.18

CHAPTER 36

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

'Om' and the Manifestation of the Universe

Sri Ramakrishna was discussing 'Om' and the manifestation of the universe with Mahimacharan and other devotees at Dakshineshwar. He said to Mahimacharan: 'You explain "Aum" with reference to "a", "u" and "m" only.' But the Master explained 'Om' on the basis of his knowledge acquired through realization. It was like the 'sound of a gong: tom, t—o—m.' There is silence everywhere. Suddenly there is the sound 'tom' and the sound becomes fainter and fainter until it finally stops. The Master gave an illustration: it is like the falling of a heavy weight into an ocean and from that a wave rises. Then gently and slowly the wave merges in the ocean. Similarly, the sound of a gong rises like a wave. The wave goes on for a while and then returns to its waveless state. The Master said: 'Waves begin to rise: the Relative rises from the Absolute; the causal, subtle, and gross bodies appear out of the Great Cause; from Turiya emerge the states of deep sleep, dream and waking. These waves arising from the great ocean merge again in the great ocean.'

The Master explained in a clear, and easily understandable way the principle of descent from the Absolute to the Relative and the ascent from the Relative to the Absolute. When the creation of the world begins, there rises a wave like the sound of a gong—'tom'. That wave moves for a while and then returns to its waveless state. Similarly, from the Turiya state originate

successively the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, and then they merge back into that Turiya. The wave of the ocean is dissolved in the ocean itself. The Master said: 'But I give the illustration of the sound of a gong: "tom" ...All this has been revealed to me; I don't know much about what your books say.'

It is not that the scriptures have not mentioned this. The scriptures say that when the creation of the universe began a sound was manifested in which the individual letters were not yet distinct. The sound was named 'Om'. Gradually from this 'Om' evolved three syllables—'a', 'u', and 'm'. It was as if this set of letters was the original material of the subtle form of the universe. Then slowly the diversity of the universe, the various names and forms, came out of that. Name and form signify the entire universe. Desire for creation of the universe originated in Brahman. He thought of creating the entire universe through names and forms. And that is how it emerged. 'Om' is the subtle manifestation of the names. In the still waters of the great ocean an object falls and then a wave arises. The wave expands in all directions and then slowly merges in the great ocean. In the same way, Brahman is the great Causal ocean; desire for creation of the universe arises in His mind. The desire is like the falling of the heavy weight in the ocean, which generates the waves of name and form. The wave that arises in the great Causal ocean is the manifestation of the universe of names and forms. The universe, or the Brahmānda, arises from the great ocean, i.e., Brahman, and merges into It. The Master gave the example to explain this principle: 'From the Absolute to the Relative, and the Relative to the Absolute.'

The Nitya and the Līlā

The world that appears before us has arisen from the eternal Brahman. From the Absolute to the Relative—He sports assuming the form of the world. It is as if He has transformed Himself into the universe, and having thus divided Himself, He sports. And when the sport ends He dissolves the creation

within Himself. The example of the ocean is indeed very beautiful. The ocean symbolizes the Cause. The 'Cause' means that from which the universe arises. In the ocean, which symbolizes the Cause in the form of water, God lies on His limitless bed, i.e., He is one with Infinity. God desires that He Himself will come into being, that He shall create the universe. He becomes sat (being); He becomes the gross, and the subtle, the effect and the cause: 'The being becomes that.' This universe is Brahman characterized by name and form. This name and form are not different from Him, because the universe is not created with any external substance. He has divided Himself into many; otherwise the creation of the universe could not have been possible. He causes the manifestation of names and forms, and at the end of His sport He causes their dissolution. Here 'dissolution' means withdrawing everything within Himself. The illustration of a spider explains the dissolution of the creation: 'As a spider spreads out and withdraws (its thread)'.¹ Just as a spider manufactures the web from its own body and takes it back within itself, God manifests Himself as the universe and withdraws it back within Himself. It is like a potter making an earthen pot out of clay. When pots break they are made into clay again. In the same way, God is the material cause of the universe; from Him the universe is created and into Him it merges. He is both the material cause and the efficient cause. If He were not sentient then who would make the plan or provide the wonderful material for the creation of the universe? An insentient object is unable to create anything by the application of intelligence. So unless an insentient object is imbued with consciousness, the creation of the universe is not possible. God has been called the 'Cause of the causes'. He is also the cause of the three distinct states—waking, dream, and deep sleep. 'He is the entire universe'² Without the Absolute where does the Relative come from or into what does it dissolve?

The world which we perceive through our five senses cannot be denied. That is why we conceive of the world as both Absolute and Relative. It constantly reminds us: I exist, I exist, I

do exist. Through form, taste, smell, sound, and sensation the world is reminding us of its existence. We have not seen the beginning of creation, but through this world we can feel its transience. The question therefore arises: Is this ever-changing world without any beginning? Is it finite? Each and every object of the world testifies that anything which is changeable has a beginning and an end. Thus, when we try to conceive of its beginning we move from the Relative to the Absolute. There are descriptions in the *Bhāgavata* and the Upanishads of how the gross becomes more and more subtle and then transforms into the cause. Finally everything merges into the great Cause. The five elements perceived by our five sense organs are earth, water, fire, air, and space. It has been analysed and determined that the world is made up of five elements. First is earth, then water, and the subtler elements follow in stages—fire, air, and space. Even though space is the subtlest, it also has a beginning and an end. But its beginning and end are unmanifest. 'Unmanifest' means that which is not expressed. In the introduction of his commentary to the *Gītā*, Śaṅkarāchārya began with this invocation: 'Om! Nārāyana is higher than the Unmanifest. The [Cosmic] Egg comes out of the Unmanifest. All these worlds, including the earth with its seven islands, are in the Egg.'

Nārāyana is the Supreme Reality. From It emerges the cause of the world, i.e. the Unmanifest. From the Unmanifest emerges the Cosmic Egg form of this universe. It is yet to manifest its different external forms. Nevertheless, it is impregnated with all evolutionary potential. It is like a potential living being existing inside an egg. All these worlds, including the earth with its seven islands, are in this [Cosmic] Egg.

It has been stated in the *Katha Upanishad*:

Superior [subtler] to the sense organs are their corresponding objects; superior to these objects is the mind; superior to the mind is the intellect; superior to the intellect is the great Self [mahat].

The Unmanifest is superior to the great Self [mahat]; the Purusha is superior to the Unmanifest. There is nothing higher than the Purusha. He is the culmination. He is the highest goal.³

The sense objects are higher, subtler, and more pervasive than the senses. The senses have been created from subtle elements. The sense objects provide stimulation to the senses, so the sense objects are superior and subtler. But compared with those sense objects, the mind (manas) is more subtle and pervasive. In the same way the intellect is superior to the mind (as it is determinative), and the great Self (mahat) is superior to the intellect. Then there is the Unmanifest, which is superior even to the great Self, and the Purusha (Brahman) is superior to the Unmanifest. There is nothing superior to the Purusha. That Purusha is the supreme Principle, the highest goal. Thus, one can reach the Absolute from the Relative.

The Upanishads also speak of the reverse process, from the Absolute to the Relative. From the Ātman emerges space, and from space emerges air, fire, water, and earth in succession. The subtle assumes gross forms in gradual succession. This phenomenon of the descent from the Absolute to the Relative and the ascent from the Relative to the Absolute is called 'anuloma' and 'viloma' by Sri Ramakrishna. In the Relative state we live in this diversified world; to reach the great Cause we have to go from the gross to the subtle and from the subtle to the cause and finally to the great Cause. It is as if these states are links of a chain, holding which we can reach the goal. That is why the scriptures speak in so many ways about the beginning of the universe. It is only in order to introduce the principle of Brahmajnāna that creation is described in numerous ways, using the illustrations of 'earth' in the *Māndukya Kārikā* and 'gold' or 'fire', etc., in the Upanishads. These are different ways to reach the goal so that by thinking about the successive steps of creation, we may take the reverse path to reach the great Cause. In fact, from the standpoint of the ultimate Truth there

exists nothing called creation and so on, but the scriptures have discussed these just to help us attain that ultimate Truth.

Creation of what is meant? If the diversified creation we see before us were fragments of Reality, then we would not be able to trace its cause. This is because an object with attributes (saguna) cannot take us to a state that is without attributes (nirguna), and that which is attributeless cannot transform itself into something with attributes. The interchange between the one with qualities and the other without qualities is impossible. These are principles with opposing properties and are contradictory to each other; so creation is called 'unreal'. 'Unreal' means that it has no objective existence. It has been stated in the *Chāndogya Upanishad*: 'O good-looking one, as by knowing a lump of earth all things made of earth become known: all transformation has speech as its basis, and it is a name only. Earth as such is the reality.'⁴

By knowing a lump of clay one can know all the objects made out of it, because the different forms of clay are but clay. Transformation into various forms is just a matter of words or names—that is, the objects made of clay merely have different names and they are not fundamentally different from clay. So clay is real, and the earthenwares are various forms of clay. The cause is real but the effect is unreal. The world is unreal, and Brahman alone is real. There is nothing wrong in the fact that despite being One He can make Himself appear as many. But Vedānta never says: He is many. In fact, according to Vedānta, if He could become many then He would no longer be immortal. He is Absolute but appears as manifold. So the variety as it appears is unreal. He who is the Cause of creation alone is true, all objects of creation are only His varied forms. Names and forms are not different from Him. So, this creation is to be understood as the apparent transformation of Brahman. If an aspirant can merge this creation into Brahman, then he can hope to attain liberation from the bondage of name and form. We cannot have any respite from successive birth and deaths until we can transcend name and form.

Views of the Philosopher and the Scientist

We have no need to know about creation, because as in science we are not trying to discover ways to exploit this world. An aspirant does not want to know the cause of this creation to discover more objects for sense enjoyment. A scientist wants to know about the world so that he can intelligently make it an object of enjoyment, whereas a jñānī searches for the fundamental Principle beyond this world so that he can establish himself in the supreme Truth by knowing It. The Master said: 'From the Relative to the Absolute.' The Absolute is true, the relative is illusory. No matter how charming the varieties in the relative world is, they have no existence independent of the Absolute. Whatever transformation the earth may undergo, it is nothing but earth. A jñānī asks: What is the necessity of knowing so many objects? Only if those diverse objects are true is there justification for knowing them. We never bother examining the details of imaginary castles that float in our mind. In the same way, to a jñānī this world is but an imagination, like a castle in the air; it has no existence at all. Earthenware pots have no existence apart from earth. If they had, we would have seen the pots in forms other than those which are connected with earth. However, we do not find that. In the same way, the diverse appearances of Brahman in this world are essentially only Brahman. So if Brahman is attained, why do we need to know Its unreal appearances? We gain only fallacious knowledge by studying unreal objects, and this can never do us any good. Liberation is attained only by knowing the Truth.

The *Chāndogya Upanishad* also gives the example of the nail-cutter: 'O good-looking one, as by knowing a nail-cutter all things made of iron become known: All transformation has speech as its basis, and it is a name only. Iron as such is the reality. O good-looking one, thus is that instruction.'⁵ If we know that a nail-cutter is made of iron, then we know all things made of iron. Transformation is a matter of name and form only. Iron is true, the objects made of iron are its transformations. A

scientist says: we cannot say that the different transformations of earth we perceive are untrue. A philosopher says that if those transformations had any existence apart from earth then they would be visible even without earth. However, it is not so. 'The existence of the transformations is totally dependent on the existence of the earth and they will be non-existent in the absence of earth' (*Tatsatte tatsattā tadabhāve tadabhāvah*).

It may become clearer if we give an example. A snake is seen if there is a piece of rope. If, however, the rope is absent it will not be seen. So it is true that the rope alone is always present. Sometimes the snake is seen and at other times not. That alone is true which is the substratum of the illusion. That which is the material of creation, the material being non-different from its transformation, is the Self (Ātman). 'Thou art That, O Śvetaketu.'⁶ If the Ātman were different from us, by knowing It we may add a little to our storehouse of knowledge, but that would not help us become free from the bondage of birth and death. The truth behind the statement 'Thou art That' is that Brahman appears in diverse and separate forms; nonetheless, It alone is the true Substance. There lies a changeless, attributeless Substance, the Absolute Truth, behind all transformations that appear before us. By knowing the Ātman thus, all sorrows are set at rest. That is why the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* says: 'If a man knows the Self as "I am this", then desiring what and for whose sake will he suffer in the wake of the body?'⁷ If an aspirant knows the Ātman in Its true essence, and not in Its illusory form, he goes beyond all bondages. If he realizes that supreme Knowledge, if he truly knows his Self, then what is there to desire, and for whose sake will he suffer in his body? This is the true significance of the scriptural explanations of creation and related issues.

Need for Divine Līlā

A question may arise: Why does God indulge in līlā? Why did He create the world? If He had not created it, we could not

trace the Cause of the world. Since we find the effect in the form of this relative world, we can trace it back to it's Cause. Creation is there to help us find our own real nature. We have been left blindfolded. A pot has been placed somewhere, and we are asked to break the pot blindfolded with the help of a staff. The game is over the moment the pot is broken, and then we will be freed from our blindfold. In the same way, while pursuing the truth we keep beating about with a staff but are unable to find the pot. More often than not we hit something else and not the pot. We do not know how long we have been on this fool's errand. If we are lucky, maybe someone signals to us or holds our hand and gives us directions: 'Move this way.' And maybe, we then strike the pot and are finally free. In the same way we are roaming about in the jungle of effects so that we may reach the Cause. This world helps us to a certain extent in our pursuit. Otherwise, with whose help can we reach the Cause?

Very often the question arises: Why was it necessary for us to move around blindfolded? We do not know why. We only know that there is a way which will lead us to the goal. So it is of no use enquiring and mulling over what happened in the beginning, or why creation came into being. We are locked inside the cage of the world while the play is going on. We must find a way to get out. The scriptures say: The way is through *Lilā* (the Relative plane). The world acts as the means to trace the Absolute from the Relative plane. This is how the aspiration for supreme Knowledge is generated. The purpose of explaining the world is to acquire the knowledge of the Supreme Reality. In Vedānta there is in one place mention of the evolution of five elements, and, elsewhere there is mention of the creation of fire, water, and food. The commentator Śankarāchārya says that it really matters little whether we say that there are three elements, or five, or for that matter three hundred. What we have to know is the fundamental Principle, the Supreme Self. This is the knowledge that will guide us out of this labyrinth.

REFERENCES

1. Yathornanābhih srijate grin hate cha...
— Mundaka Upanishad, 1.1.7
2. ...aitadātmyam idam sarvam...
— Chāndogya Upanishad, 6.8.7
3. Indriyebhyah parā hyarthā arthebhyascha param manah,
Manasastu parā buddhirbuddherātmā mahānparah.
Mahataḥ paramavyaktam avyaktātpurushah parah,
Purushānna param kinchit sā kāshthā sā parā gatih.
— Katha Upanishad, 1.3.10–11
4. Yathā Soumyaikenā mritpindena sarvam mṛinmayam
vijñātam syādvāchārambhanam vikāro nāmadheyam
mṛittiketyeva satyam.
— Chāndogya Upanishad, 6.1.4
5. Yathā Soumyaikenā nakha nīkrintanena sarvam
kārṣṇānyasam vijñātam syādvāchārambhanam vikāro
nāmadheyam kṛṣṇānyasamityeva satyamevam soumya sa
ādesho bhavātīti.
— Chāndogya Upanishad, 6.1.6
6. ...Tattvamasi Śvetaketo...
— Chāndogya Upanishad, 6.8.7
7. Ātmānam chedvijānīyādayamasmiti purushah kimicchan
kasya kāmāya śarīramanusamjvaret.
— Brihadāranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.12

CHAPTER 37

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

The Master was talking about God with the devotees at Dakshineswar. He said: 'Worldly people ask why one does not get rid of attachment to "women and gold".' The question arises naturally in the minds of the devotees as to why the attachment for sense objects does not depart. The Master replied: 'If a man once tastes the bliss of Brahman, then his mind no longer runs after the enjoyment of sense pleasures or wealth or name or fame.'

Meditation on God and Acquiring Dispassion

There is a kind of renunciation which requires an aspirant to work hard and practise control so that his mind is kept away from sense objects. In the words of the Master, it is forced renunciation. There may be some results if somehow the sense organs are withdrawn from sense objects, but attachment does not leave us. So the question arises, how do we get rid of attachment? As the *Gītā* says: After realizing the supreme Truth, attachment for sense objects falls away. If one has the vision of God then attachment to sense objects goes away. To the question why it happens so the Master has replied elsewhere: 'Suppose there are two magnets, one big and the other small. Which one will attract a piece of iron? The big one, of course. God is the big magnet. Compared with Him, woman is a small one. What can woman do?' There is a beautiful poetic description in the *Bhāgavata*. When Lord Krishna played His

flute the gopīs madly ran to Him, leaving aside their household work. One of them was busy cooking, another serving her husband, someone else breast-feeding her child, and yet another getting dressed. In this way, though they were busy with various activities they ran as if mad, drawn by the irresistible attraction of God. Household work and duties to members of the family become insignificant compared to the attraction of God. There is no stronger attraction that can obstruct this attraction. In the incomparable words of the Master: 'The moth no longer enjoys darkness if it has once seen the light.'

In this regard, the Master spoke about Rāvana. In order to win over Sītā Rāvana assumed several forms. Somebody said to Rāvana, 'You have been going to Sītā assuming different forms; why don't you go to her in the form of Rāma?' 'But,' Rāvana replied, 'When I meditate on Rāma in my heart, even the position of Brahmā appears insignificant to me, not to speak of the beauty of another man's wife.' How can desires then remain? The more a person meditates on God the more his attachment for sense enjoyment diminishes. The more one advances towards the east the more the west recedes. Attachment for sense objects goes away on its own. In the words of the Master: 'Sense pleasures appear more and more tasteless as love for God grows.' He gave another illustration: 'Can one who has tasted a drink of sugar candy enjoy a drink made of ordinary molasses?' If one lives in the world even after attaining God, he lives as one liberated (jīvanmukta). It is said in the *Gītā*: '...he exists in Me—in whatever condition he may be.'¹ Wherever he may be, the yogī ever abides in God. The disciples of Sri Chaitanya lived as householders in a spirit of detachment. In the language of the Master: 'The more you love the Lotus Feet of God, the less you will crave for the things of the world or pay heed to creature comforts. You will look on another man's wife as your mother and regard your own wife as your companion in spiritual life. You will get rid of your bestial desires and acquire godly qualities. You will be

totally unattached to the world. Though you may still have to live in the world, you will live as a *jīvanmukta*.'

A Devotee's Behaviour and Ideal

There were two groups amongst the devotees of Sri Chaitanya—monastics and householders. And their relationship was sweet. The same sweet relationship was also noticed between the monastic and householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. The householders knew that the monastic devotees were like the life-breath of the Master; on the other hand, the monastic devotees knew that the householders were intimate companions of the Master. If each devotee has such a sweet relationship with God, there will be no conflict with his or her family life. Roy Rāmānanda was a householder. When dramas on the divine *līlā* of God were enacted he himself used to adorn the *devadāsīs* (temple maidens). We may think, what kind of behaviour is this? But he saw the *devadāsī* being adorned as the actual character she was to play in the drama. His mind was above the distinction between man and woman. Of course, it would not have been possible had his mind not been tuned to the highest ideal. Anybody else trying to follow his example would certainly land in difficulty. Once a *devadāsī* was singing from the *Gīta Govindam*. On hearing the song, Sri Chaitanya in his ecstatic state ran to embrace her. His servant Govinda ran after him and caught him. As Sri Chaitanya was in an ecstatic state most of the time, Govinda would follow him as his ever-vigilant guard. On returning to the normal plane Mahāprabhu said: 'Today you have saved the body of this *sannyāsī*. I was not in my normal awareness. If I had embraced the *devadāsī* in my ecstatic state, I would have had immediately to cast off the body.' In spite of such an exalted state he would have had to cast off his body! In the absence of such an example the ideal degenerates, having fallen into the hands of unworthy followers. The monk and the householder—both should maintain a spotless ideal. Here Sri

Chaitanya and Roy Rāmānanda set examples for the monks and the householders respectively.

Once the Master went to see the play 'Chaitanyalilā.' During those days actresses were from the lower class of the society. How did the Master enjoy their acting? He said: 'I found the representation to be the same as the real.' Such perception is only possible in a state of ecstasy. The Master saw even a fallen woman as the manifestation of the 'Blissful Mother'. But while interacting in the normal plane, even he had to observe caution so that there could be no scope for any moral degeneration in society. Even when such persons had no consciousness of the body, they had to be very careful so that high ideals were set for the good of the society.

REFERENCE

1. *Sarvathā vartamāno'pi sa yogī mayi vartate.*

— *Gītā*, 6.31

CHAPTER 38

The Gospel (October 28, 1884)

The Master said to Mahimacharan: 'You may quote thousands of arguments from Vedānta philosophy to a true lover of God, and try to explain the world as dream, but you cannot shake his devotion to God. In spite of all your efforts he will come back to his devotion.' The pestle was almost worn out with rubbing. Only a little was left. That fell into the underbrush and brought about the destruction of the race of Yadus. Devotion is deeply embedded in the heart of a true lover of God. 'It may wane a little now and then when he indulges in philosophical reasoning, but it ultimately returns to him increased a thousandfold.' In this regard the Master used to divide his devotees into two classes, one born with an element of Śiva and the other born with an element of Vishnu. A person born with an element of Śiva becomes a jñānī, while one born with an element of Vishnu develops ecstatic love for God; the qualities are ingrained in each. So none can forsake one's natural attitude.

Devotion is Imperishable

Here is the tale of the Yadu dynasty. To make fun of the sages, the Yādavas dressed Śāmba as a pregnant woman and took him to the sages and asked, 'Pray tell us, what child will be born of her?' Blessed with inner vision, the sages cursed them saying: 'A pestle will be born which will destroy the Yadu dynasty.' The Yādavas became scared and while undressing

Śāmba they discovered a pestle. The Yādavas surrendered themselves to Sri Krishna who advised them to take a dip at holy Prabhās to be free from the sages' curse. But what about the pestle? He advised them to destroy it by grinding it into dust. While doing so some scraps fell into the sea, which were washed back on shore and became a cluster of verbena reeds. The portion which could not be ground was thrown further into the sea. But the sage's curse was infallible. Soon after, the descendants of the Yadu dynasty argued amongst themselves and while drunk fought with those very reeds.

One part of the pestle which was thrown into the sea was swallowed by a fish. A hunter named Jarā found that portion by cutting open the fish and made a sharp arrow out of it. Meanwhile, Lord Krishna found that the purpose of his coming to this world had been fulfilled, and the Yadu dynasty had also been destroyed. While enjoying divine protection, the Yadu dynasty had become formidable and at the same time corrupt. If they remained alive for long they would do much harm to the world. So before His sport in human form would come to its end God intended to destroy them. As the shore keeps the sea under control, so had He kept their power under check. With the end of His sport, they would have wrought havoc in the world.

The story subsequent to the destruction of the Yadu dynasty is indeed very painful. Lord Krishna was resting under a tree. He had no duties left to be accomplished. He had taught the *Gītā*, and Uddhava had been suitably advised to sing the Lord's name before everybody. So the Lord was now ready to depart. In the meantime the hunter named Jarā saw the Lord's yellow cloth and, mistaking it for a deer, shot the arrow made from the piece of pestle. The arrow hit the Lord's foot. Rushing to the spot, the hunter found that he had hit Lord Krishna himself. He cried piteously, saying, 'O Lord, what have I done?' The Lord consoled him by saying that there had to be some pretext for his divine sport to end, so he was not to blame.

Latent Tendencies and Paths of Sādhana

That is why it has been said, 'The pestle led to the destruction of the clan'. The Master explained the significance of the tale by saying that if love for God is awakened in the heart of a devotee, no matter how much it is rubbed against the stone of knowledge, like the pestle in the story, bhakti cannot be erased. A trace of it remains, which eventually rises to the surface again. That is why the Master told Vijaykrishna Goswami: 'You have the seed of devotion in you. You shall have to come back through the path of devotion.' Vijaykrishna was born into the family of the great Advaita Goswami. How can the seed of devotion die? One who is born with an element of Vishnu has to return to the path of devotion, no matter which path he may be treading now. In this way, the Master used to identify which path was meant for whom and would advise the devotees accordingly. Otherwise, they would waste much time and energy. But we should understand that by the Master's classification of devotees into those having an element of Śiva and others having an element of Vishnu, he is not saying they are essentially different. They are only prepared in two different moulds but are made of the same substance. The Supreme Brahman sports in one form as Śiva and in another form as Vishnu. Infinite are His manifestations, Infinite are His forms. The Master's classification was made in regard to our particular tendencies. The Master encouraged everyone to proceed according to his inclination, because an aspirant makes the best progress by following the path suited to his nature.

CHAPTER 39

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

The Master was talking about God with Mahimacharan and other devotees at Dakshineswar.

Once Rāvana said, 'When I meditate on Rāma in my heart ... then even the position of Brahmā appears insignificant to me, not to speak of the beauty of another man's wife.' The statement raises the question: 'Does it mean that by meditating on Rāma, or realizing Rāmachandra, one attains a state superior to Brahmajnāna (supreme Knowledge)?' The point here is not one of high or low, or superior or inferior. It is said in the scriptures: 'Something is criticized to praise another thing.' (*Anyanindā anyastutaye*). Besides, there are hyperbolic statements too. These are found not only in religious literature but in works on rhetoric as well. Such statements are intended to make a specific point. Here 'the position of Brahmā becomes insignificant while thinking of Rāma' refers to the attainment of Brahman. A devotee does not want to attain the supreme state of Brahman; he wants to be distinct from God so that he can enjoy Him. As Ramprasād sang: 'I don't want to become sugar; I want to taste it.' This, indeed, is a devotee's feeling; this is how he wants to enjoy God.

Variety of Sādhakas

It is not possible to compare the two states—one, a devotee's idea of enjoying the personal God, and the other, a jñānī's state of supreme Knowledge. This is because a jñānī

wants supreme Knowledge while a devotee does not want that. Instead, he yearns for devotion. So the question does not arise as to which is superior or inferior. Here He (as supreme Truth) is as eternal as His divine sport. Whatever state a person seeks, becomes great to him. The ideal a seeker wants will be the best for him. To enjoy some other ideal is like an intrusion into other's domain. And the seeker does not appreciate that. Hanumān's attitude was that of a servant. Had he been questioned why he had not chosen the attitude of woman toward her beloved (*madhurabhāva*), he might have replied, 'I have no taste for that.' In the devotional scriptures the attitudes—viz., *śānta*, *dāśya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *madhura*—have been extolled as each being superior to the previous one. Nonetheless, the scriptures add that whichever one a person follows is the best for him. To Hanumān the form of Rāma was the best, so the state of supreme Knowledge was inconsequential to him. To the *jñānī*, the attainment of supreme Knowledge alone is covetable, and from that consideration the form of Rāma is unimportant.

Now it is not possible to clearly ascertain which is superior and which is inferior. Of course, attempts have been made, and the debate has been going on since time immemorial. One group says theirs is the best; another says it is theirs. But the fact is, like God, the moods to approach Him are endless. An aspirant practising even one of the moods is hardly able to fathom its depth. No matter how intensely one may taste His bliss it is not possible to exhaust God. So it is useless to try to judge which is the best or which is the worst. The best form is the one in which a devotee enjoys His vision and bliss. That is why we find that the Master forbade his disciples to follow another's attitude. 'That isn't your attitude,' he would say. As his admirers treated him in different ways so he would behave differently with them. He advised everybody to carefully maintain his or her own attitude. He never said that one was superior or other inferior. Here the intent is not to degrade Self-Knowledge; rather one is sidelined so as to laud the other. The state of

supreme Knowledge is slighted in order to praise the form of Rāma. In the same way the form of Rāma is insignificant to a jñānī. There is nothing called a neutral attitude. Our ideal determines our attitude. One has to follow it to go forward.

If one has to speak about the ideal independent of any person or aspirant, it cannot be done because to a liberated soul the questions relating to the devotee and God, or the worshipper and the worshipped, do not arise. We can understand the state where God has various forms and where the worshipper is distinct from Him. A sādḥaka who worships Brahman in order to attain Self-Knowledge is certainly not established in Brahman. He aspires to attain that state, and he has accepted that he is different from Brahman. If, however, he is able to transcend his limitations in whatever way possible, either by worship and meditation, or by the cultivation of knowledge, or by any other means, then he attains Brahman. But till that time he is different from Brahman for all practical considerations. Otherwise, who will worship whom? We should place implicit faith in our own path and hold on to it firmly. Nobody can make any progress unless he has faith in his chosen path. Suppose, an aspirant regards his chosen deity from the viewpoint of the ultimate Reality where everything is unreal. Then he would say: 'O illusory Mother Kālī, grant me this or that.' Does anybody pray before an illusory object? So that cannot be the attitude. Then again, will one who is pursuing the path of Brahmajñāna say that his efforts to gain that knowledge are false? Is it ever possible? He will proceed with firm faith that his efforts are true. There is nothing higher or lower in this. Each one will have to taste the bliss of his chosen Ideal in his own way.

Sri Ramakrishna's Realization and Advice

In this context the Master said: 'Why should I lead a monotonous life? I enjoy my fish in a variety of dishes: curried fish, fried fish, pickled fish, and so forth! Sometimes I worship God with rituals, sometimes I repeat His name, sometimes I

meditate on Him, sometimes I sing His name and glories, sometimes I dance in His name.' Such an attitude is unique to Sri Ramakrishna; one does not come across such an attitude elsewhere. Other sādhakas can at best adopt one ideal. If they cast themselves into a particular mould, they attain fulfilment. But the Master was not satisfied with that. He wanted to show the entire world: 'All the moulds are true.' So he cast himself in all moulds to show that 'it is possible [to attain Truth] this way or that.' And herein lies the Ramakrishnaism of Sri Ramakrishna.

But to do this is not possible for all. It is necessary for an ordinary aspirant to have faith in his own chosen ideal. He has a small mind and it cannot hold all ideals. So with his small mind if he can concentrate on a single ideal he can attain fulfilment through that. But this is not enough for one who has come to guide people of the world in their individual paths. He has to experience all the ideals, and it is only after fully acquainting himself with all the paths that he can guide others. It is not proper to say that since he is an Avatāra he is omniscient. He himself has to practise various spiritual disciplines and attain knowledge of them and then teach them to the world. It is only then that the world can draw inspiration from these spiritual exercises and move forward along some path. Otherwise, though perfect, God cannot help us, as He is beyond our comprehension. However, if He assumes a human form and lives amongst us, practises spiritual disciplines like us, attains the supreme Truth, and shows how this can be attained, then we may understand that we can also achieve the goal. The Master was importunate: 'You [Divine Mother] have revealed yourself to Ramprasād, and you also blessed Kamalākānta. Why do you not reveal yourself to me?' Drawing an analogy from this we feel that She will reveal Herself to us if She has revealed Herself to Sri Ramakrishna. That is why an Avatāra needs to practise spiritual disciplines. No doubt an Avatāra is perfect and illumined from birth, yet he has to demonstrate all the stages of spiritual life when he assumes a human form. Even though his

knowledge is innate, he has to cultivate it in order to set an example for the world. This is as true of jñāna as it is for all facets of bhakti. He himself goes through all avenues of expression in order to teach us: 'Look, you are to move in this manner, through this way. You will face such and such obstacles; these are the signs; this is the path to reach there. And this will be your experience after you reach there.' In this manner he teaches all the individual disciplines to aspirants.

The Master gave an example: 'When a bird teaches its young ones how to fly, it flies from one branch of the tree to another. As it flies it now and then rests for a while. Thus the young ones learn how to fly step by step. If the bird flew away straight to the sky, its young ones could never learn how to fly.' In the same manner, an Avatāra practises spiritual exercises in his own life to show us how to advance step by step. And he is an Avatāra because he shows us the way and, that is why we need him. Had he not taught us in this way, we would have no need for his coming. We would have drawn a blank from him. That is why he practises spiritual disciplines. So Sri Ramakrishna practised all the disciplines in order to show us that there is nothing higher or lower, none superior or inferior, with regard to principles or ideals. Whichever path an individual aspirant chooses, he attains fulfilment through that chosen path. There is no difference of high or low.

Finally the Master said: 'A man born with an element of Śiva becomes a jñānī; his mind is always inclined to the feeling that the world is unreal and Brahman alone is real. But when a man is born with an element of Vishnu he develops ecstatic love of God.' That one eternal Parameśvara sports as Śiva in one form and Vishnu in another form. That One manifests in different forms. There is nothing superior or inferior in it. What manifests are two moulds—one of knowledge and the other of devotion. We can build up our lives in conformity with one of them depending upon our particular tendencies and the degree of their manifestation. The principle is but one and the same—Parameśvara.

CHAPTER 40

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

Sannyāsa and Scriptural Injunctions

At the beginning of the chapter M. beautifully describes in just a few words the relationship of Hazra with Sri Ramakrishna. The Master asked Hazra to go back home and meet his mother. He told him: 'You have to discharge your duties to your mother, wife, and children. Do you think people of the locality will bring up your children?' Hazra did not want to go home. He told Mahimacharan that the Master was forcing him to return home. So Mahimacharan came to the Master to plead for him. The Master asked if it was ever possible to call on God while causing one's mother to grieve? The Master's statement seems inconsistent. It gives rise to the question whether monks do not have mothers. Do those mothers not suffer? Here the Master says that there can be no compromise between God and any other thing. No obstacle should be allowed on one's path to God. He does not make any compromise in this regard if there is strong renunciation. If it is otherwise then there arises many considerations and calculations as regards father, mother, relatives, society, country, etc. If one develops longing for God—in the words of the Master, if one is 'mad with love of God'—then he has no duty to perform. But until such ecstatic love overwhelms one, the fetters of duty and the scriptural injunctions remain. When an aspirant is filled with intense yearning, he is freed from all bondage and he rushes towards God. For one who faces the question of renouncing worldly life,

he must judge whether he wants to renounce to avoid the problems of life, or due to genuine longing for God. Hazra and others like him do not like dealing with the difficulties of worldly life. But why shall life free us from what is due? It will wrest its claim with accrued interest.

The significance of the Master's statement that he could not stay at Vrindāvan because the thought of his mother came to his mind is different. He had to set an example, which he did in as many ways as possible. Here he said one thing. Again at another place he said, 'When a man is intoxicated with ecstatic love of God, ... he has no duty to perform.' It is said in the *Gītā*: 'That man who rejoices only in the Self and is satisfied with the Self, and is contented in the Self—for him there is no duty to perform.'¹ The scriptures do not prescribe that such a person be bound by any duty. Had they done so then sannyāsa would not have been scripturally valid. Over this issue there is an age-old controversy between the Vedāntins and the Mīmāṃsakas. According to Mīmāṃsakas, sannyāsa is not sanctioned by the scriptures. According to them the scriptures exhort one to perform sacrifices like the Agnihotra as long as one lives. Exemptions may be allowed in cases of those who are blind, lame, and crippled, and those who have no capacity to work. What is the use in prescribing injunctions for them? Only one who is capable may be asked to perform duties. There is no point in asking someone who is incapable to work. So, as long as one is capable one must perform the duties enjoined in the scriptures; one cannot embrace sannyāsa. It must be understood that according to the Mīmāṃsakas the scriptural injunctions on sannyāsa are for those who are incapable of doing their duties.

A jñānī (Vedāntin) holds just the opposite view. He says that so long as there are desires, the instructions on karma are valid. When one has desires—I shall marry and beget a son, and the son will complete my unfinished duties, and so on—the instructions on discharging duties are valid. But one who has been able to free himself from attachment, or is trying to be free, wonders: 'Why do I need all this?' One begets a child for the

sake of this phenomenal world. But one who does not hanker after either this phenomenal world or the transcendental world has no use for children or for performing rituals. Sannyāsa is prescribed for such people. So long as one has desires one has to perform actions, but when one develops detachment for sense objects one may renounce. At that time one need not think about who is left behind, or who is not, who will grieve, or who will feel hurt, and so on. The Master says that laws do not apply to one who has become a lunatic. Therefore, if one becomes mad for God he has no duty to perform. For him no work exists.

From what is known about Hazra, he did not possess an intense feeling of renunciation; he was of the calculating type. That is why the Master said that he had duties to perform. Escapism by avoiding duties will not do. No matter how great the physical hardship is or the other difficulties are, one must attend to one's duties in minute detail. One whose life is full of detachment, or one who is trying to be free from worldly attachment, or is successful in being free from desires may renounce the world. The *Jābāla Upanishad* says: 'Be a householder (grihī) after completing the stage of a unmarried student life (brahmacharya). After the householder's life (gārhaṣṭhya) accept the life of retirement (vānaprastha). After the life of seclusion accept sannyāsa. Or, you may accept sannyāsa directly from the stage of brahmacharya, or from the stages of gārhaṣṭhya or vānaprastha.... As and when you acquire detachment accept sannyāsa.'² One who is not yet ready to accept sannyāsa, that is, who has not developed strong renunciation, may steadily prepare himself and advance towards the path of sannyāsa.

Scriptural Injunctions and Parents' Duties

Brahmacharya is preparatory to all other stages of life, so it is the first stage and is prescribed for all. After this stage one decides whether one should enter worldly life or renounce it, depending on the intensity of the feeling of renunciation. If the feeling of renunciation is not so intense, the aspirant must

follow the path of gradual liberation (*kramamukti*). It is like this: after living the celibate life and cultivating restraint the mind becomes purified, and the power of discrimination becomes finer. Now let him choose his own way of life. Neither the parents nor any other person can decide the course of his life for him. The duty of the parents ends in providing proper education to their children. Parents may think: We have brought up the child by feeding him and providing him so much. Hasn't the child any duty towards us? Certainly the child has a duty towards his parents. Should, however, the child opt to move towards the path of *sannyāsa* keeping a noble ideal in view, then the scriptures encourage instead of preventing him. But parents discourage him because they are worried about what will happen to them. While discouraging their child, they do not keep in mind that they are not genuinely concerned about the child's welfare. Rather, they only betray their selfishness. It is as if that selfishness is wrapped in gold when they put the question: 'Hasn't the child any duty towards us?' Perhaps the child has a duty to perform. But is the bringing up of children like an investment so that the child in his turn will look after his parents? Then where is the greatness of fatherhood and motherhood? It degenerates into a business proposition. A shop is opened with so much capital investment and it should yield so much profit. Parenthood becomes just a business, and there is nothing great about it. But the duty of parents is of a much higher order. Parents do not bring up their child with the thought that after the child grows up he will serve them. A child is helpless. Out of affection the parents bring up their child and they find pleasure in it. Let the child grow up and after proper education return what he had received with accrued interest. It can be a sensible business proposition. But if the child wants to go forward keeping in view a noble goal, should we not encourage him? For example, for defending the country soldiers are required. Suppose parents say: 'Let the rank and file be filled by other peoples' sons and not ours. We praise the victorious army but we don't

want our sons to join the army.' In the same way, seeing a sannyāsi we say: 'O, what a noble life, totally dedicated to the cause of others! A wonderful ideal indeed! But let others' children follow that ideal, not ours.' Such an attitude is nothing but hypocrisy.

Swamiji cited the example of Queen Madālasā. Madālāsā used to rock her baby in the cradle and right from his birth sing: 'Thou art that pure Ātman' (*Tvamasi niranjanah*). The little child grew up hearing this from his mother, and when he was old enough, renounced the world. In this way all her boys grew up and renounced the world. Was the mother wrong? There are no parents who do not want the happiness of their children. Now it is not proper to assume that happiness should be had only by becoming like them. Can we not patiently help our children to be happy the way they should be, and empathize with their happiness? It is natural that parents feel sad to part with their children. Out of their sense of affection they want their children to grow up, enjoy life, and be happy the way they feel life is enjoyable. Perhaps there is nothing wrong in it. The sense of renunciation is absent in them and so they fail to encourage their children in the path of renunciation. The Master has set an example for all. Having already drawn Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda) towards the path of renunciation, he was wondering whether to pull away Baburam Maharaj's younger brother too. He thought for a while and said: 'I've already drawn one. Let the other one stay.' There is no dearth of instances in this holy land of Bhāratvarsha when the parents gladly bless their children to live the life of renunciation.

Now let us go back to the question of sannyāsa. If somebody renounces the world to avoid its difficulties, he will not only fail to become a monk, he shall be unfit to live in society as well. A person does not live in a vacuum. He has to live in the midst of his relations, society, and his country. And naturally he has certain duties towards all of them. But when his mind intensely longs for God, none of these duties can

become hurdles to his journey Godward. Cowardice is the other name for that renunciation which is bred from trying to avoid the problems of worldly life. The scriptures do not support it. Even when Arjuna was beset with the so-called sense of compassion for his near relatives, just before the great battle began at Kurukshetra, Lord Krishna despised it saying that it was cowardice and not compassion. The same Lord Krishna again said that for one who is contented in the Self there is no duty to perform.

Sri Ramakrishna Shows the Way

When Nag Mahashay wanted to renounce the world the Master forbade him, saying: 'You must live the householder's life. Seeing you, people will learn how to live in the world.' He lived a householder's life in order to set an high ideal before society. He had no duty as such. When the five-year-old boy Nārada renounced the world after the death of his mother, God appeared before him and said: 'Preach the path of devotion everywhere.'

There are two tendencies in the world—taking an active part in worldly affairs (pravritti) and renunciation (nivritti). Both have scriptural sanction and are applicable according to eligibility. Now if it is said that everybody must live a worldly life, it would be silly. It is as if Providence has assigned us the responsibility of preserving and sustaining the entire universe! No one has given us any responsibility. It is we ourselves who have decided that it is our duty, that it needs to be performed, and we are acting accordingly. So long as we have desires we take the burden of duty on our shoulders. When our desires go away, all our sense of duty will instantly vanish.

We have to understand the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's advice to Hazra from this angle. While advising Hazra, the Master took into consideration his natural tendencies, the level of his spiritual development, and so on. Again, the Master taught just the opposite to Narendranath and other monastic

disciples, saying that they must renounce everything for the sake of God. He gave many examples to drive home the truth: 'God is the highest. All other things are secondary. God is higher than our parents.' Whereas he advised Hazra: 'Can anyone practice religion if it brings grief to his parents?' The Master was a deft physician; he prescribed different diets for different patients according to their needs. There is no uniform diet for all. Even as it is improper to say that everybody should become monks, it is equally wrong to say that everybody must live a householder's life. Very often parents want to bring up their children according to their own conception of life, which is wrong. Every child is born with a personality of his own. It is the duty of parents and teachers to help the child manifest his own personality and thus develop himself to his full potential. It is not proper to try and cast a child in a set mould. He has to develop in order to serve the needs of society. It does not matter whether the need is to fight for defending the motherland or to serve the nation through other kinds of hard work. One has to work according to one's own nature. Or, if it is possible, the parents may also discharge their duty by encouraging their child in the path of renunciation and thus set a glowing example before society. The Master examined the issue from both points of view—from that of parents and from that of the child. We come across numerous instances like this in the *Gospel*.

REFERENCE

1. *Yastvātmaratireva syādātmatriptāśca mānavah,
Ātmanyeva cha santushtastasya kāryam na vidyate.*
— *Gītā*, 3.17

2. *Brahmacharyam samāpya grihī bhavet, grihī bhutvā vanī
bhavet, vanī bhutvā pravrajat. Yadi vetarathā brahmacharyād
eva pravrajedgrihādvā vanādvā.... Yadahareva virajettadahareva
pravrajat.*

— *Jābāla Upanishad*, 4

CHAPTER 41

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

Towards evening Sri Ramakrishna was pacing back and forth his room at Dakshineswar. At dusk incense was burnt in his room, and as usual he bowed before the pictures of the gods and goddesses on the walls and softly chanted their names. From outside one could hear the murmuring of the Ganges and the music of the evening worship in the temples of Kālī, Vishnu, and Śiva. Here was the Blissful Mother's never-ending festival—as if human beings were being reminded: 'Don't be morose. Be joyful ... We have a Mother.' Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room in his usual blissful mood. M.'s description of that evening arises like a beautiful picture before us.

Two Kinds of Devotion

A devotee of the Master named Ishan Mukhopadhyaya was present. He used to practice japa, meditation, and other religious rites such as the puraścharana. The Master told him: 'You practise religious rites—japa, fasting, and the like. That is very good. If a man feels sincerely drawn to God, then God makes him practise all these disciplines. The devotee will certainly realize God if he practises them without desiring their results.'

This remark of the Master deserves special attention. First, he said: 'If one does things with the idea "I do as He makes me do", then egoism does not develop.' Second, 'work

without desires leads to God.' 'A human being achieves success by adoring God through his own duties.'¹ An aspirant attains success by worshipping God through the work prescribed for him by the scriptures and suitable for his stage of life. If one's actions are not tainted with the desire for results such as achieving a certain goal, or acquiring the pleasures of heaven, then one attains God. Ritualistic devotion is good as it takes one to the path of God. But performing acts of ritualistic devotion with desires will yield only the desired result, whereas if one performs worship without desires one attains God. Ishan Mukhopadhyaya used to perform desire-induced rituals like the *puraścharana*. This cannot bring about any spiritual progress in the life of an aspirant. 'Obtaining which one does not think of any other acquisition to be superior to that.'² That acquisition is the attainment of God. Attaining Him one acquires everything. The aspirant is satisfied forever. Absorbed in the Self he becomes identified with the formless Supreme Self. He finds the fountainhead of bliss within himself. This is, indeed, the state of a liberated soul.

The goal of worshipping God is not achieving worldly success. The goal is the attainment of the state of *niḥśreyasa*, or the attainment of God as an end to all of life's problems forever. That is why the Master advised Ishan to perform work being free from egoism and without any desire for results: 'A devotee observes many rites because of the injunctions of the scriptures. Such devotion is called *vaidhī bhakti*.'

Next he spoke about *rāga bhakti*. 'But there is a higher form of devotion known as *rāga bhakti*, which springs from yearning and love for God. Prahlaḍa had such devotion. When a devotee develops that love, he no longer needs to perform prescribed rites.' This idea occurs in a song of *Rāmprasād*:

What need have I of *kośā* and *kuśī**?
What need of formal show of worship?

*Copper utensils used in formal worship.

One who is able to keep his mind on Him, does not need to perform formal worship or follow conventional practices any further. A sense of distance, of diffidence, of veneration, marks *vaidhī bhakti*; but the moment love for God is developed He becomes the devotee's own. This ecstatic love for God has been described in the devotional scriptures, and its culmination is the love of the *gopīs* as described in the *Bhāgavata*.

Separated from Krishna the *gopīs* were pining away for Him, so the Lord sent Uddhava to console them. Uddhava came and told the *gopīs*: 'God is the indweller. He resides within your hearts. Meditate on Him and you shall see Him.' The *gopīs* replied: 'How can we meditate on Him? The mind with which to meditate has already been given away to Him. So with what shall we meditate?' Uddhava was a *jñānī*; but he had no understanding of how intense a devotee's yearning for God could be. The Lord sent Uddhava to the *gopīs* to teach him this. The Master advised Ishan in the same vein: 'That is very good....But there is a higher form of devotion known as *rāga bhakti*, which springs from yearning and love for God.' The scriptures sanction *vaidhī bhakti*; but this devotion does not arise spontaneously from one's heart. When God appears very dear and near then one need not approach Him through structured paths or observe set disciplines.

Mīrā's Loving Service

There is a beautiful story in this regard. In a temple at Vrindāvan, Mīrābāī was cooking food for the deity. She was in the habit of cooking while singing beautiful songs. One day the chief priest of the temple saw Mīrābāī busy cooking food for the deity without taking her bath or even changing her clothes. The priest took her to task for cooking food in such an unclean, impure state. He also informed her that the deity would certainly refuse the food so served. The next day Mīrābāī took a bath, put on fresh clothes, and began to cook food for the deity

with utmost care. She was always afraid lest she do something wrong while scrupulously trying to follow the scriptural injunctions. After three days the Lord appeared to the chief priest in a dream to inform him that for the past three days He could not eat. The priest thought it must have been due to Mirābāī's profanity and her failure to observe the scriptural rules. But the Lord said: 'She is always scared lest something become unclean or impure. I miss her loving, sweet touch; I no longer find the food tasty.' The priest then begged Mirābāī's forgiveness and requested her to continue her usual loving service to God.

The story signifies that no rules are necessary when one worships God from the core of one's heart. If God appears before us, shall we say: 'Wait till I purify the seat for You?' While worshipping the Divine Mother the Master sometimes threw flowers at Her feet, and sometimes placed flowers on his own head. He would say: 'O Mother, wait, don't start eating. Let me utter the mantra.' One must understand Sri Ramakrishna's words. It is good if one worships God with complete detachment and without vanity, but serving God with love is still superior. Mantras become unnecessary and assume a secondary importance at that stage. In the pure bliss of service to Him, we enjoy His bliss. One does not get the taste of such bliss in *vaidhī bhakti*. However, beginners on the path of spiritual discipline need *vaidhī bhakti* as it slowly awakens love for God in them. So *vaidhī bhakti* is the means, while *rāga bhakti* is the goal. While appreciating the need for ritualistic devotion, the Master pointed out Ishan's mistake.

King Akbar and the Mendicant

God hears the earnest prayers of His devotees. But the Master asks: 'After approaching the king, will you pray for gourds and pumpkins?' It is idiotic to pray for trifles like gourds and pumpkins to one who can grant unlimited splendours. God is the King of givers. He even gives away

Himself. Is there anyone else who can also give himself away? The Master says that if you become friends with the master of the house you don't have to face humiliation from his servants. So it is advisable to develop a loving relationship with the master of the house. Sri Ramakrishna examined the issue from a practical point of view. There is a story: Once a mendicant went to the emperor Akbar to beg for alms. The emperor was saying his prayers. He prayed, 'O Lord, give me money; give me wealth.' The mendicant started to leave the palace, but the emperor motioned him to wait. After finishing his prayers, Akbar came to him and said, 'Why were you going away?' The mendicant replied, 'You yourself were begging for money and wealth; so I thought that if I must beg, I would beg of God and not of a beggar.'

Desireless Worship and Karma

There is no doubt that the gods and goddesses to whom we pray are more powerful than we are as they are divine, but they too pray to the Supreme Lord. Then why are there so many gods and goddesses? According to our understanding we may accept each individual god or goddess as an aid towards the attainment of our petty needs, or as the representation of the Supreme Lord Himself. The deity is the same but the difference lies in the way we look at him or her. While worshipping the goddess Kālī, it is necessary to complete the worship of the sixty-four yoginīs (female ascetics) before worshipping the principal deity. For vaidhī bhakti this is the rule. In the performance of sacrifices a large number of deities are to be meticulously worshipped; otherwise there will be no result. If there is even a single incorrect pronunciation, what a calamity there can be! Once a sacrifice was performed with the intention of destroying Indra. The mantra should have been, 'Let the enemy Indra be destroyed.' But due to faulty pronunciation the invocation meant that Indra's enemy, Vritrāsura, should be destroyed.

Due to the wrong pronunciation the meaning became different.

God does not see the faults of one who worships Him without any desire. Is God there to harm us? God does not accept anybody's virtue or sin. It is stated in the *Gītā*: 'The Omnipresent neither accepts anybody's sin nor even virtue. Knowledge remains covered by ignorance. Thereby the creatures become deluded.'³ We should love God instead of being afraid of Him. It is stated in the *Bhāgavata*, 'The love that is born of devotion brings a thrill to the body.' Vaidhī bhakti not motivated by any desire or egoism generates rāga bhakti, the outer manifestations of which are tears and trembling.

It is natural for us to commit some mistakes while performing actions, so we should be prepared to face the consequences. It is axiomatic that as smoke envelopes fire, all human actions are covered with failings and faults. So in order to remove this defect which is inherent in selfish actions, it is better to perform actions without desire than actions with desire. In this way, the mind will be purified, and then love for God will be awakened in such a pure mind. There is no shop-keeping in this, such as, 'I deliver so much and you pay for it.' A person begins worshipping God impelled by desires, but in the end he surrenders the fruits to God. The path of worship, or adoration, teaches one to do so. What do we gain by surrendering the fruits of our actions to God? He returns them with limitless bounty. A farmer scatters a handful of seeds in the field, but always with the desire that he will get back a thousandfold in the form of crops. In the same way a person no doubt says, 'Lord, I surrender all these to you', but in his mind he silently prays: 'O Lord, be gracious enough to return limitless bounty.'

REFERENCES

1. *Svakarmanā tamabhyarchya siddhim vindati mānavah.*
— *Gītā*, 18. 46
2. *Yam labdhvā chāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tatah.*
— *Gītā*, 6.22
3. *Nādatte kasyachit pāpam na chaiva sukritam vibhuh,*
Ajānenāvritam jñānam tena muhyanti jantavah.
— *Gītā*, 5.15

CHAPTER 42

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

The Jiva: Dependent or Independent?

Many times we wonder: Does a human being act on his own or is he controlled by God's will? Does he have any freedom or is he totally dependent? In this chapter of the *Gospel* the Master discusses these issues, and reconciles the conflict between 'predestination' and 'free-will'; between 'liberty' and 'necessity'.

The Master has just narrated the story of a righteous weaver. Incidentally, he says that without God's vision one cannot realize the significance of 'Rāma's will' (mentioned in the story of the virtuous weaver). One cannot therefore understand that it is the Lord who is causing everything to happen. Residing in the hearts of all beings He makes them dance like puppets. People say 'I do' but actually it is He who does everything. 'You do Your own work, O Mother, but men call themselves the doers.' If only we had divine insight, we could see that we are mere instruments. Since we don't realize this, we have the sense of being the doer. He makes people act in various ways through diverse arrangements. He makes some do virtuous deeds and others do evil deeds. However, this does not make Him partial. Whom shall He favour? It is He alone who is everything. The one He rewards or punishes is He Himself. Finding a splinter of wood stuck in the tail of a grasshopper, the Master exclaimed: 'O Rāma, you have caused this injury to your own self!'

After praising Lord Śiva in numerous ways in the Vedas, He is branded thus: 'You are a thief, you are a fraud.' The idea is that He is everything—good and bad, sacred and profane. But we want to see Him only as good because we have the sense of difference between good and bad. In our eagerness to drive away what is bad, we try to concentrate on what is good. Thus it is necessary to have a benign vision. We need to fix our mind on the noble attributes of God; otherwise, evil tendencies in us will increase. So our sādhanā is to drive away the evil by the good, and how do we do that without discrimination? What is the nature of this discrimination? He is one thing and I am another, I being a minute particle of the world. I live in this world; so I have the awareness of good and evil in the world. Therefore, I always try to avoid evil. After He is seen everywhere, this kind of discrimination does not remain any longer. When He abides everywhere in His fullness, then who is good or bad? As everything happens by 'Rāma's will' then why should we value our own will or of any Tom, Dick, or Harry?

Does this solve the problem of whether a man has free-will or not? Actually, when a man thinks of himself as an independent being—I am such and such—he does so from his sense of egoism. The sense of free-will remains as long as the 'I' sense prevails. Thereafter, when we learn to see Him everywhere we cannot find our 'I' any more. The individual does not exist nor does free-will. Thus, we should understand from the story of 'Rāma's will' that every individual is under His control.

Jīva's Journey Towards the Goal

Now M. asked, 'Why does He give people bad tendencies?' The Master replied: 'He has created tigers, lions, and snakes in creatures, poisonous plants in trees. He has also created thieves and dacoits among men. He created the universe. Who can say why He did that? Who can understand God?' When we try to know God's motives, we are trying to

understand the Principle which is beyond reasoning through reasoning, which is impossible. Therefore, the Master said: 'As long as a man has not realized God, he fails to comprehend the principle of 'Rāma's will'. The knowledge of virtue and vice, the sense of responsibility, and the feeling of doership will persist until one attains full faith.

M. was thinking about the love of the Master. The Master loved Keshab Sen so much because he was a devotee of God. Ignoring Keshab's caste and creed, the Master appreciated his devotion. Indeed, that is the only touchstone. It is through the path of devotion that those who believe in God with form and those who believe in the formless God become one. That is how the Hindus, Muslims, and Christians unite. Whoever displays such devotion will be accepted by the Master as his own. If one is a devotee, he is the Master's own. Though following diverse courses, all rivers merge into the sea. All have the same goal—the sea. Like the sea, God is limitless, infinite. We are, each one of us, tiny streams flowing through different courses to merge into the same sea. The sea is our ultimate destination, where we finally end our journey. External diversity notwithstanding, the Supreme Principle is immanent though hidden in everyone of us in the form of tiny streaks, or like faint flickers of light. We are advancing towards the glorious centre of light in different ways and through diverse paths. As we move forward, the barriers of our individual identities melt away. When drops of pure water are poured into pure water, everything becomes pure water. In the same way, one who realizes Brahman verily becomes Brahman. If a drop of water is coloured, then it maintains its tinge even when it is poured into an expanse of water. So the drop should be pure. As we are poured into the sea of Brahman we shall cease to be individuals and merge into the sea. So we should be free from all blemishes. Guile keeps us away from God. Our individual identity alone is that guile. As soon as one realizes God fully, his individual fragmented identity dissolves and the jīva ceases to be a jīva. However, the jñānī's idea is that he is

always the sea because nothing exists other than the sea. But the jīva puts up fences around himself and thinks he is small or fragmented. This is his imagination. Being under the spell of ignorance, the fence has been raised erroneously. The devotee imagines or adores God as absolutely pure. God is consciousness in essence; a devotee too is so essentially. To begin with, however, he thinks of himself as small and fragmented while the One who is worshipped is immutable consciousness. Gradually, as the devotee becomes purer, he does not find any difference between the two. The One who was being worshipped all along was in reality the worshipper. His worship ends as he merges with the worshipped. So, depending upon their preference there may be some marginal difference between a jñānī and a bhakta, but essentially no such difference exists.

Is the World Like a Dream?

M. reflects on yet another issue. 'The Master doesn't describe the world as a dream. He says then, "It will lack its full weight."' Is not the statement 'the world is a dream' also within this world? If it is within the world then the statement itself is also like a dream. Is the statement 'the world is unreal' true? Indeed, there is this idea that the entire creation is like a dream. Is he who says this unreal? Is his statement unreal? Then where does Brahman fit in? The speaker who speaks about Brahman is but a part of this world. Then his statement is also unreal. There are many discussions on this issue. It is described as 'the unrealness of unreality'. The very word 'unreal' is unreal. Actually the principle is this: so long as we have the 'I' sense and the awareness of the world, it cannot be said that the world is unreal like a dream. The conclusion that the world is like a dream appears to have been made on a different plane. Actually those who live in this world, i.e., all whose activities like studying, cultivating knowledge, worship, meditation, etc. are within this world—cannot say that the

world is like a dream. Of course, from the standpoint of Reality everything is unreal.

But what do we gain by knowing this? We have to strive to get past this state covered by ignorance, practise spiritual discipline, and on attaining fulfilment, become one with the Reality and attain liberation. If this state of ignorance is considered unreal, have we any way out? It is like what is said about dreams: We are riding a chariot in our dream. 'The chariot, the horse, and the path, nothing exists there. The movement is also false. The seer of the dream creates the chariot, the horse, the path, and the movement.'¹ Thus, our practising spiritual discipline and attaining realization is but a dream. It is from this standpoint that it has been stated in the *Māndukya Kārikā*: 'There is no dissolution, no origination, none in bondage, none striving or aspiring for salvation, and none liberated. This is the highest truth.'² This is the supreme Truth. Only if there is bondage will the question of liberation come. Therefore, the supreme Truth can be known through the process of 'not this, not this'. But what do we gain by such knowledge? I am an individual. In this infinite ocean of darkness, I do not see land in any direction. How shall I be redeemed?

Vedānta and the Path of Devotion

The scriptures say that we cannot proceed along the spiritual path if everything is considered unreal from the very beginning. It is a fundamental tenet of Vedānta that we have to perform sādhanā and discriminate between the real and the unreal depending on this phenomenal world and the state of jīvahood. So it is said that both the real and the unreal have been mixed in the relative plane. Therefore the scriptures advise us to accept our own self and the world as real in the beginning. Viśiṣṭādvaita has accepted this to some extent. The Master also says that the world is not unreal; otherwise 'it will lack its full weight.'

Naturally the question arises, was the Master a follower of Viśishtādvaita? We do not know which philosophy the Master did not follow. He was an Advaitin, a Dvaitin, a Viśistādvaitin, and also a follower of any other philosophy in between. The Master would say that we must transcend the Vedas and Vedānta. It does not mean that he spoke lightly of the Vedas. The Master stated this to make us understand that the Vedas are also within this limited world. When one realizes Brahman, all relative knowledge becomes ignorance. It has been stated in the Vedas itself: when one attains supreme Knowledge 'the Vedas are not the Vedas'. Therefore, so long as we live in this relative world we are to understand that the real and the unreal are intermixed in us. And it is not possible to say 'The world is like a dream', with our extant 'I'. We err in applying Vedānta that way. Once the Master heard some slander about a Vedāntin and questioned him about it. He replied: 'The world is unreal in the past, present and future. Isn't then that also untrue?' Annoyed, the Master reproached the Vedāntin. Likewise, we incorrectly apply Vedānta when we use standards of one plane while we are established in a different one. Therefore, Āchārya Śaṅkara has admitted relative truth. So long as we have the sense of 'I' we have to live in this relative plane of Śakti. We cannot claim to be free from this illusory spell, the divine power of creation, preservation, and destruction. Freedom is possible only if He sets us free. He has placed us in bondage and it is He who will set us free. This is what the Master meant by saying 'Rāma's will'. In order to attain freedom from this bondage, it is necessary to study the scriptures and follow the path of sādhanā enjoined therein. We have to choose our own method of sādhanā and be free from the influence of māyā.

It is stated in the *Devī Māhātmya* that if one takes refuge with Parameśvarī, the Divine Mother, She will lead one to the path of freedom. It is all the same whether you call It Parameśvara or Parameśvarī, Śiva or Śakti. In the path of devotion it is total surrender, and in the path of knowledge it

is discrimination to realize one's true nature, Brahman. Whichever path an aspirant may follow, if he once attains that Reality, he will see no difference between the macrocosm and the microcosm.

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1. *Na tatra rathā na rathayogāh na panthāno
bhavantyatharathān rathayogān pathah srijate.*
— *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 4.3.10
2. *Na nirodho na chotpattirna baddho na cha sādhakah,
Na mumukshurna vai mukta ityeshā paramārthatā.*
— *Māndukya Kārikā*, 2.32

CHAPTER 43

The Gospel (March 11, 1885)

With the Devotees at Balaram's House

M. begins this chapter of the *Gospel* by telling why the Master visited Balaram's house so often. Most of the householder devotees lived near his house at Bāghbazār. So the Master would meet them there. The Master would tell everybody: 'Balaram is a true bhakta; he everyday worships the Lord of the universe, his household deity; his offerings are therefore always acceptable.' The Master had no objection to taking food there. The actual reason, however, was that the devotees living nearby could be invited to the house. That was the main reason for his attraction for Balaram's house. There was no problem for those who could visit him at Dakshin-eshwar, but he could not forget those who could not come there. So the Master would personally go to them. The devotees could easily assemble at this place. That was why the Master was so drawn to Balaram's house. Here the Master met many special devotees for the first time, such as Girish Ghosh. It was also here that there was so much dancing and singing at the time of the car-festival. Many times the devotees met here 'at the durbār (royal court) of God's love'. The Master often asked Balaram to invite young disciples such as Rakhal, Bhavanath, and Narendra to his house saying 'These pure souls are the veritable manifestations of God. To feed them is to feed God Himself. They are born with special divine

attributes. By serving them you will be serving God.' In this way he drew the devotees nearer to him.

M. was the subject of conversation now. He used to teach at Vidyasagar's school nearby and often brought good students with pure tendencies to meet the Master for their own welfare. M. did this earnestly as part of his duties. Ordinary people objected to it. According to them the boys were going astray and they blamed M. for it. What a serious offence: instead of trying to build their careers the boys were running after God!

Cultivation of Knowledge and Service to the Guru

That day M. came to Balaram's house and found some young devotees surrounding the Master. It was noon, and the elderly devotees had gone to work. Those school or college-going young boys might have skipped their classes to come here. Looking at M. the Master enquired: 'You are here! Is there no school today?' M. replied that as he had not much work at school then, he had come to see the Master. One of the devotees joked: 'It is not that the boys alone skip classes. The teacher is also playing truant!' M. thought: 'Alas! It is indeed as if some invisible power had drawn me here.' The Master became a little thoughtful, wondering whether M.'s coming amounted to some negligence, some mistake or failure in his duty. Thereafter the Master asked M. to serve him for a while. M. thought: 'I do not know how, as a disciple, I should serve the Master. So the gracious Master is teaching me.' The *Gītā* says: 'Know that through prostration, inquiry, and service...'¹ It is as if the Master made M. serve him before giving advice. Of course, there is no mention of the advice given on the occasion.

The Master's Renunciation

The Master next confided to M. about the state he was then passing through. It had become impossible for him to

touch any metal. On his way to the toilet it was necessary to carry a brass water jar, but he could not touch it even after covering it with a towel. He said that he felt a terrible pain in his arm. To put it in his own words: 'I felt as if I had been stung by horned fish. There was an excruciating pain all over my arm.' We cannot understand why the Master felt like that. Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar thought that the cause of the Master's deep-rooted aversion against the use of any metal. Normally by metal we mean coins. It is stated in one of the Upanishads: 'No monk will touch gold as it brings attachment.' The Master did not experience this after studying the Upanishads. It was as if the Divine Mother was making him realize these truths and would not allow him to touch any metal. We learn from the above state of the Master about his supreme renunciation of wealth.

Naren and Girish

Sri Ramakrishna profusely praised the younger Naren. But he was apprehensive: 'The younger Naren often visits me. Do you think his people at home will object?' On many occasions the younger Naren's relatives objected to his visiting the Master. Meanwhile one of the devotees reminded M. that it was time to go. Though M. took leave he returned after school hours due to his intense attraction for the Master. He found that the Master was sitting surrounded by his admirers and disciples. The Master's face was beaming with a sweet smile, which was reflected in the happy faces of those in the room. Indeed, joy is contagious. The Master himself was joy personified and the joy radiating from him touched all the people around him.

The Master asked Girish: 'You had better argue this point with Narendra and see what he has to say.' Girish's faith in the Master was most ardent. The Master used to say that Girish had 'more than one hundred percent faith.' No one else was imbued with such faith. The Master greatly enjoyed seeing

Girish argue with Narendra. Both of them were intelligent devotees. One of them would not believe anything till it was tested and verified, and the other one was a staunch believer. Their contrasting temperaments notwithstanding, both of them were great devotees. Indeed, this was the speciality of Sri Ramakrishna. He considered people of different temperaments as his own and encouraged each one to progress following his own ideal. He made M. swear three times: 'Say, "I will not reason any longer."' M. solemnly promised not to reason any more. Sri Ramakrishna, however, did not prohibit those who were of a logical temperament from reasoning. He used to encourage Naren to reason: 'Test and verify whatever I say. Never accept anything just because I have said so.' That is why he asked Girish to argue with Narendra. Girish said: 'Narendra says that God is infinite; we cannot even so much as say that the things or persons we perceive are parts of God. How can Infinity have parts? It cannot.'

God and Incarnation

The Master said: 'However great and infinite God may be, His essence can and does manifest itself through man by His mere will. God's incarnation as a man cannot be explained by analogy. It is a matter of experience.' There does not exist a second object that can be compared with infinity. Comparison is possible only if there is another infinity. He is Incomparable.

Though He is infinite, how does He come down as an Avatāra? How He becomes so is beyond our comprehension. We say glibly, 'God has manifested Himself.' It is said in the Purāṇas: 'God has descended from Goloka [the celestial abode of God].' Does His celestial throne remain vacant during the period He comes down? It is ridiculous. In the Purāṇas we often find Brahmā requesting God: 'O Lord, kindly return to us. It has been a long time since you left Goloka. We miss your presence.' That is to say, since He has come to earth He is

absent at Goloka. Such tales have been fabricated by our imagination. When we go to Benāras or elsewhere from Calcutta, certainly we are absent from Calcutta, so we imagine similar things about God. We think that when He has come down on earth, His celestial throne must certainly be vacant. With our limited understanding we human beings imagine God also to be limited. But one whose intelligence has become pure sees Him as infinite. If His descent at Vrindāvan from Goloka causes a vacancy there, how can He be infinite? That would have made God limited to the realm of Goloka. Narendra said: 'God is infinite. How can Infinity have parts? It cannot.' It is stated in the Upanishads: 'Om. That [Brahman] is infinite, and this [universe] is infinite. The infinite proceeds from the infinite. [Then] taking the infinitude of the infinite [universe], It remains as the infinite alone.'² Whatever we see as the effect is infinite, and the Unmanifest, the Cause, is also infinite. From the infinite Cause emerges the infinite effect. If infinity is taken from infinity, it is infinity that remains. Modern mathematics also asserts this. No mutation of infinity is possible. Why can the infinity not be mutated? The sky is all-pervasive. Is there anything by which it can be broken into parts? A division in the sea water is possible by drawing water out by a jar. But if the sea were as all-pervasive as the sky, such a division would not be possible. A jar will fail to divide the sky, because the sky is everywhere, within and without the jar. Only a finite or mutated object can have parts. Therefore, to think that by incarnating God loses a part of His infinitude is only an illusion. That is why it is stated that the infinite cannot have parts; it cannot be divided.

The Master, however, said: '...His essence can and does manifest itself through man by His mere will.' Had the Master said that such manifestation was possible, it would have amounted to a mere theoretical conclusion. But the Master said emphatically: 'can and does manifest', because it was his direct realization. It is beyond human intelligence to understand how He manifests in a tiny human form being infinity Himself.

There is a wonderful statement of Devakī in the *Bhāgavata*: 'I am a mere frail woman named Devakī. It is inconceivable that He is born out of my womb as a small child!' How could He who is infinite become so small? The Master said that however great and infinite God may be, He does incarnate by His mere will. How this happens cannot be explained. There is nothing comparable by the help of which it can be explained.

There is no analogy, true; but if somebody realizes it, that cannot be rejected. Inference is secondary. It lacks in force. Inference depends on realization. Therefore, based upon his direct perception if somebody proclaims: 'I have known It. I have seen It clearly and It is intelligible to me,' then his statement cannot be rejected. Thus the Master said: An analogy can give us only a little glimpse. But God is incomparable. Only if there is a second one like Him can a comparison be possible. There is a beautiful story in the *Bhāgavata*. The sage couple Sutapa and Priśni did great tapasyā with the desire to have God as their child. God appeared and asked them to pray for a boon. They said, 'We want a child like you'. 'Agreed', He said. But as He failed to find a second one like Him in the three worlds, He said: 'Failing to find a second one comparable to Me—In virtue, character, and generosity, I was born as a son unto you. And became famous as Prśnigarbha throughout the universe.'³ The Lord said that He searched in all directions but failed to find a second one gifted with virtues and generosity like Himself. 'To keep my word I shall myself be born as your child.' In beautiful poetic language it is said—He Himself is His comparison. So it has been declared in the scriptures: *Na tasya pratimāsti*. The Lord is infinite. He has no parallel. The Master said: 'He is incomparable.'

Girish was of the opinion that God incarnates as an Avatāra and the divine force works through Him bringing about human welfare. There is milk in the cow, but it comes through the udder. No doubt God is omnipresent, but He manifests His compassion for human beings through the Avatāra. How does He manifest it? God incarnates Himself as

a human being from time to time in order to teach people devotion and divine love.

Narendra replied to Girish's explanation in this way: 'Is it ever possible to know all of God? He is infinite.' Narendra was expert in reasoning; but from the Master's point of view an error was found in his argument. So the Master said: 'Who can comprehend everything about God?' Let alone knowing Him fully, He is not understandable even partially. He is immutable, indivisible. He is the same in His totality as much as in His part. 'It is not given to man to know any aspect of God, great or small. And what need is there to know everything about God? It is enough if we only realize Him.' His power is manifested in the Avatāra, so if we see His incarnation it is as good as seeing Him. 'Suppose a person goes to the Ganges and touches its water. He will then say, "Yes, I have seen and touched the Ganges." To say this it is not necessary for him to touch the whole length of the river from Hārdwar to Gangāsāgar.' In the same way He is specially manifested in an Avatāra. To see him is to see God. Jesus said in the Bible: 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'⁴ One who has seen the son has seen the Father as well. Jesus called himself the Son of God. He used to say, 'the Son of MAN', where the word 'MAN' is written in capital letters to signify the son of God. Fire, as one of the five elements, exists in all things; but its manifestation in wood is greater. That is why Girish said: 'I am looking for fire. Naturally I want to go to a place where I can get it.' He is present everywhere. However, by coming near an Avatāra if one gets the Lord's company what need is there to know whether He is infinite or not? In one place one gets everything!

The Manifestation of Power in an Avatāra

Sri Ramakrishna said: 'If you seek God, then seek Him in man.' It is indeed a wonderful and thought-provoking

statement. With the aid of his sense of perception a human being understands God better in the form of man. That is why he said: 'He manifests Himself more in man than in any other thing. If you see a man endowed with ecstatic love, overflowing with prema, mad after God, intoxicated with His love, then know for certain that God has incarnated Himself through that man.' The same thing has been stated in the *Gītā*: 'Whatever object is verily endowed with majesty, possessed of prosperity, or is energetic, know for certain each of them as having a part of My power as its source.'⁵ The Lord says: 'All objects have come from My power alone. Wherever you find grace, beauty, power, and the manifestation of prosperity, know for certain that I am there.' The divine feeling that becomes so intense in a human being is not seen anywhere else. The Master said elsewhere: 'The ordinary jiva does not experience mahābhāva or prema. He goes only as far as bhāva. Only an Avatāra attains mahābhāva or prema.' He further explained: '... the manifestations of His power are different in different things. The greatest manifestation of His power is through an Incarnation. Again in some Incarnations there is a complete manifestation of God's power. It is the Śakti that is born as an Incarnation.' It is as if an Avatāra appears in a human form drawing power from God. By Its light all this shines. So it is He who manifests Himself in an Avatāra as well as in a non-illuminated soul—the difference lies in the degree of manifestation. In an Avatāra the expression of His power is greater; and at times there is a complete manifestation.

The Master said: 'It is Śakti that is born as an Incarnation.' We should not misunderstand this statement. Śakti does not mean some special goddess. God and Śakti are non-different. Śakti influences God in His acts of creation-preservation-destruction. When He is engaged in acts of creation-preservation-destruction, we call Him Śakti. It is Śakti that becomes an Avatāra and engages in divine sport. He becomes part of His own creation by manifesting Himself.

He is Known by the Pure Mind

Girish said: 'Narendra says that God is beyond our words and thought.' It is repeatedly said in the Upanishads, 'From where words along with the mind turn back without reaching [Brahman]...'⁶ That is to say, we cannot express Him through sounds or words. We cannot reach Him by the mind either. The mind is but a small function of His, so He is beyond words and the mind. The Master, however, disagreed with Narendra's statement: 'He is, no doubt, unknowable by this ordinary mind, but He can indeed be known by the pure mind.' The Master's statement is clearly supported in the Upanishads: 'Know that alone to be Brahman which the mind cannot comprehend and which they [the sages] say makes the mind function. It [Brahman] is not this sense world that people worship.'⁷ Again, in some other context it is said, 'He is to be attained through the mind alone.' These statements seem to be contradictory. The Master has resolved the issue, which incidentally is supported by the scriptures. He is knowable by the pure mind, and not by the mind that we know, which is impure. The Master said: 'Pure mind, pure intelligence, pure Ātman are one and the same thing.' When the mind is purified (why mind alone; it applies to all other objects as well) by removing the qualities attributed to it, whatever remains is God Himself. The pure intelligence and the pure Ātman are thus one. One who knows Brahman becomes non-different from It. He transcends his individual identity to dissolve into the infinite. The infinite alone is true and whatever is seen as finite (in different names and forms) is attributed to it. When the ignorance of the seer is removed, he who was pure by nature returns to purity. When the mind and intellect think, they think impelled by the Self. But when the mind analyses and discovers its true nature as consciousness, that is verily the state of the pure mind. So, He who is beyond mind and speech is realized by the pure mind.

Thereafter the Master said: 'Didn't the rishis and munis of olden times see God? They realized the all-pervading

Consciousness by means of their inner consciousness.' This statement is indeed thought-provoking. Seeing or realization is not possible with the help of any sense organ or through any instrument. We perceive objects through our sense organs like the eyes, ears, nose, etc. Perception comes when both the objects and the sense organs unite. But here, realization transcends all the senses.

The experience of the inconceivable Principle comes when we transcend all sense organs and reach the state of the real nature (swarupa) of the object. That is why the Master raised the question: 'Didn't the rishis and munis of olden times see God? They realized the all-pervading Consciousness by means of their inner consciousness.' The Master often said: 'God is experienced only as Consciousness by man's inmost consciousness.' In other words, pure Consciousness is realized by pure intelligence. Pure intelligence, which is not conditioned or distorted by sense organs, and the pure Ātman are one and the same thing. That is why consciousness realizes Consciousness. When the limiting adjuncts, that is, the gunas or qualities that separate pure intelligence from the infinite are removed then one realizes pure intelligence. It can be said the other way round that pure intelligence is the Ātman itself.

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1. *Tadviddhi pranipātena paripraśnena sevayā.*

— *Gītā*, 4.34

2. *Purnamadah purnamidam purnāt purnmudachyate,
Purnasya purnamādāya purnamevavaśishyate.*

— *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, 5.1.1

3. *Adrishtvanyatamam loke śiloudāryaguṇaih samam,
Aham suto vāmabhavam Priśnigarbha iti śrutah.*

— *Bhāgavata*, 10.3.41.

4. Bible, St. John 14.9

5. *Yadyad vibhutimat sattvam śrīmadurjitameva vā,
Tattadevāvagaccha tvam mama tejo'mśasambhavam.*

— *Gītā*, 10.41

6. *Yato vācho nivartante. Aprāpya manasā saha.*

— *Tattirīya Upanishad*, 2.4.1

7. *Yanmanasā na manute yenāhurmano matam,
Tadeva Brahma tvam viddhi nedam yadidamupāsate.*

— *Kena Upanishad*, 1.6

CHAPTER 44

The Gospel (March 11, 1885)

Sri Ramakrishna was at Balaram's house. This house was his drawing-room, as it were. At his request the song 'O Keśava, bestow Thy grace upon Thy luckless servants here', composed by Girish, was sung. It was one of the Master's favourite songs. The Master enquired and learnt that Girish himself had composed all the songs of the play 'Chaitanyalīlā'. That particular song was sung in chorus on the stage. The men on one side and the women on the other sang alternately. The song was written to express the feelings of both the gopas as well as the gopīs at Vraja. It highlighted on the one hand Sri Krishna's heroism and on the other his charming beauty.

At the Master's request the singer Tarapada sang two more songs. First, a song in which Nitāi^{*} exhorts people to share Rādhā's love, 'Come one and all! Take Rādhā's love! The high-tide of her love flows by.' Sri Gaurāṅga is identified with Rādhā. Seeing Sri Gaurāṅga and understanding the state of ecstasy he is in, Nitāi sings. Sri Gaurāṅga is immersed in the mood of Rādhā, and his whole body is radiating light owing to his being lost in Rādhā's mood. From his nature, his lustre, and his devotion he seems to be Rādhā. Following this another song was sung: 'Who art Thou, Gaur of golden hue, That quenchest the thirst of my soul?' The song conveys the idea that Gaurāṅga is the manifestation of Rādhā and Krishna combined.

*Shortened name of Nityānanda, the companion of Sri Chaitanya in his divine play on earth.

Everybody present requested M. to sing. He had a very sweet voice with a feminine quality and could sing with deep emotion. But he was very shy and begged in a whisper to be excused. Girish smilingly told the Master: 'Sir, we can't find a way to persuade M. to sing.' M. was embarrassed. The Master, annoyed at M. for not singing said: 'Yes, he can bare his teeth at school, but shyness overpowers him when he is asked to sing!' The Master often asked that M. sing songs expressing feminine emotions. Such songs sung now in M.'s melodious voice would have captivated all; so he requested M. to sing. But shyness had overpowered M.

The Master used to introduce his devotees to each other. He would also try to exalt any quality he might observe in somebody and see that others also appreciate it. He said to Suresh Mitra: 'What are you? He [Girish] has surpassed you'—that is, in terms of devotion and faith. Suresh said, 'Yes sir, he is my elder brother.'

Girish then changed the subject. Though he had not had much education when he was young, many people called him a learned person. With a view to exposing the hollowness of book-learning the Master said to M.: 'Mahimacharan has studied many scriptures. A big man. Isn't that so?' M. only said, 'Yes, sir.' But Girish said: 'What? Book-learning? I have seen enough of it. It can't fool me any more.' Though Girish neglected his studies in his boyhood days, he studied much later. Now, having reached the feet of the Master, he started acquiring a new knowledge. So he said, 'It can't fool me any more.' He realized the worthlessness of book-learning.

The Usefulness of the Scriptures

Pleased at Girish's humble attitude the Master said with a smile: 'Do you know my attitude? Books, scriptures, and things like that only point out the way to reach God. After finding the way, what more need is there of books and scriptures? Then comes the time for action.' He next told a parable of the lost

letter. After a long search a letter was found. In it was written that five seers of sweets and a piece of cloth must be sent to someone. The letter was then put aside and the recipient went to procure the articles. Similarly, the scriptures show us the way to God. What will it avail us if we sit on the books, or if the ideas are repeated before people? The significance or usefulness of the scriptures will be appreciated only when they are assimilated properly and the attempt is made to apply them in one's own life. Before that they are just like the contents of the letter or like mere scholarship. The utility of the scriptures lies in learning the path to God. Thereafter they may be cast aside like the letter. 'In the scriptures you will find the way to realize God. But after getting all the information about the path, you must begin to work. What will it avail a man to have mere scholarship? A pundit may have studied many scriptures, he may recite many sacred texts, but if he is still attached to the world and if he inwardly loves "woman and gold", then he has not assimilated the contents of the scriptures. For such a man the study of scriptures is futile. The almanac forecasts the rainfall for the year. You may squeeze the book, but you won't get any water—not even a single drop.' The idea is: if the scriptural injunctions are merely repeated without applying them in life, it amounts to carrying about a load of words. In the scriptures this idea has been described as 'the ladle enjoying the taste of food.' Food is served with the help of a ladle, but it is unable to taste it because it has no sense organ. A mere pundit is like a ladle, an inanimate object. He studies and discusses the scriptures but never tries to apply the teachings in his own life. For him, studying scriptures is an exercise in futility. The scriptures say that such and such things are to be done for the attainment of samādhi. What use is it, if he merely memorises and recites those injunctions?

Swamiji once said that much study makes a man a learned fool. The Master said: 'If I see a pundit without discrimination and love of God, I regard him as a mere piece of

straw.' His learning is futile. A constant stream of words flows from the mouth, each word being interpreted in different ways—all this may earn applause from people. But how does one profit by it? Śankarāchārya said: 'Loud speech consisting of a shower of words, the skill in expounding the scriptures, and likewise erudition—these merely bring on a little personal enjoyment to the scholar, but are no good for liberation.'¹ These expositions and commentaries may earn riches, esteem, and material prosperity, but in spiritual life they have no value. On the contrary, they become hindrances as they make one proud. The learning which is used to mesmerize others was not worth a penny to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master used to tell the parable of a celebrated *Bhāgavata* pundit. The pundit used to read scriptures to a king and would ask if the king understood what was said. The king would put the same question to him—if the pundit himself had understood it. These sessions with questions and counter questions continued for some days, until good sense dawned on the pundit. He realized that throughout his life he had merely deliberated on the *Bhāgavata*, but had never tried to apply it in his life. Realizing this he renounced the world. But before he left home he sent word to the king: 'Yes, O king, now I have understood.' The *Bhāgavata* says: Surrender your mind to God after purifying it. Until that is done, there will be no clear understanding. So the Master said: 'The pundits talk big, but where is their mind fixed? On "woman and gold", on creature comforts and money. The vulture soars very high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pit. It is continually looking for charnel-pits and dead bodies.'

Again the Master's attention was drawn to Narendra; so he said to Girish: 'Narendra is a boy of a very high order. He excels in everything: vocal and instrumental music and studies. Again, he has control over his sense organs. He is truthful and has discrimination and dispassion. So many virtues in one person.' With a view to enlisting M.'s support, he asked him: 'What do you say? Isn't he unusually good?' M. replied, 'Yes,

sir, he is.' There were two reasons for this. First, to help establish an abiding relationship of mutual love, respect, and appreciation amongst the devotees. Second, if someone's good quality is mentioned, other devotees would learn to appreciate that quality and they would try to emulate it. This is the reason why the Master praised a person before others.

Girish Ghosh

The Master had talked about Girish earlier. Once again he mentioned him, saying: 'He has great earnestness and faith.' M. looked at Girish and marvelled at his tremendous faith. Girish had been coming to the Master only a short time. To M. he seemed to be a familiar friend and kinsman, related to him by the strong bond of spirituality, as if he was one of the gems in the necklace of the Master's devotees.

The Master's unique relationship with Girish is beyond our understanding. He put up with such outrageous behaviour from Girish. At times Girish would even use abusive language towards Sri Ramakrishna. One day Girish was totally drunk and abused the Master in the worst possible language. After the Master had left for Dakshineshwar, Girish was despairing: 'Can anybody endure that? I'll no longer be able to go to him. If I cannot go to him, of what use is my life?' He was in great agony, with tears flowing ceaselessly. At Dakshineshwar the Master became restless, saying, 'I shall have to go to Girish!' The devotees who had witnessed the incident were wondering how the Master could be so eager to see Girish after enduring abuse in such vulgar language. It was unthinkable. When the Master refused to consider their protests a carriage was sent for. On the way the Master could hardly put up with any delay and asked the carriage to speed up. When they came near Girish's house he got down and walked hurriedly. Entering the house he found Girish in great sorrow. Girish fell prostrate before the Master and said: 'Can there be any doubt that you are an Avatāra? And why should I be blamed? If you have

given only poison to a person, what else can he worship you with?' The Master understood. He knew that Girish had become overwhelmed with great sorrow, so he personally came to set his mind at rest.

The Master had a very intimate relationship with his devotees. He once said: 'Do you know how it is? It's like a man who is thrilled when he suddenly meets his near relations after a long time. I feel the same way if I see one of my intimate associates, whom I have not seen earlier. It is his first visit, he doesn't know me; as if I too have no knowledge of him earlier. Seeing him suddenly I spring up in surprise.' He did this when he saw those who belonged to his inner circle. In spite of his intense love for Girish, he warned his monastic disciples: 'Look, Girish is very good, no doubt, but he is like a cup that once contained a solution of garlic. Even after washing, a trace of its smell will certainly linger.' In other words, he would not like his monastic disciples to be tainted by the smell. The Master warned his devotees even about Girish, whom he loved so deeply. Having observed how willingly the Master had accepted the abuses of Girish, a devotee thought that perhaps the Master would be pleased to hear abuses. Emulating Girish, that devotee once took liberties with the Master, though with some reservation. The Master told him smilingly: 'Look, my child, that is not your way.' What is proper for Girish or Naren may not be so for others. The Master would carefully ascertain which attitude would suit each individual. Blind imitation of others would only bring about disaster. One day, observing that Tarak (later Swami Shivananda) was taking down notes of his conversations, the Master told him: 'Look, this is not meant for you. There's another person chosen for this job.' On the other hand, as M. used to take notes of the day's conversations, the Master would sometimes ask him, 'Well, what did I say on that day in such and such house?' M. would reply and the Master would again ask, 'What else did I say?' In this way he would ask about all the minute details to see if M. could

repeat all the facts of a particular day. At times he would correct M.'s account, saying: 'No, I didn't say that. I said like this.' It was like proof-reading to detect errors before printing. He trained M. this way because he would have this work done through him.

Narendranath

The Master trained Narendranath to be the leader of the future monastic order (sangha). Though Narendra was junior to many others in age, the Master found in him their future leader. He openly said to everybody: 'Naren will teach others.' All the brother disciples knew that Narendra was their leader, appointed by the Master himself, and it was their duty to carry out his orders without question. Therefore, despite many differences of opinion, they were ever ready to obey Narendra, having unstintedly accepted his leadership. Indeed, the Master trained him beforehand. He also helped Girish progress in order to make him a model of faith. In this way he created an ideal of some extraordinary quality out of each one of his disciples. Each of them became an exemplar in a particular area. Each one of them manifested a special quality and he encouraged him or her to develop it to its full potential. He would, however, forbid blind imitation by one of another's ideal. Like a deft housewife, he would serve food suited to each individual's constitution. To put it in his own words: 'The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children.' He alluded here to how he cultivated different ideals in each of his disciples.

Going back to where we began, Narayana asked the Master if there would be any further singing. To ordinary people it would appear that Narayana was just a child putting a naive question to the Master about singing. Indeed, that was their relationship. Like the snakes, charmed by the music of the snake-charmer, his disciples used to be captivated and overwhelmed with emotion listening to the Master's singing.

Music and Spirituality

In what way did the Master want his devotees to practice spiritual discipline before dawn? Once when Swami Shivananda Maharaj was asked about it, he said: 'Well, my child; rising very early before sunrise the Master used to chant God's name in a melodious tone. The chanting would melt even a stone. At that blessed moment the mind would soar high without any spiritual practice, meditation, or japa.' Music itself has a penetrating influence, and more so when sweet songs came from the Master's melodious voice. The devotees used to say that except the songs of the Master and Narendra, songs sung by others failed to move them. That music was so wonderful that, the disciples considered it as an inner path to God. All the disciples of the Master used to sing, and most of them were blessed with sweet voices. Indeed, wonderful were those songs! If even their songs were so sweet, one cannot imagine the intensity of those songs which used to hold them captivated.

It is possible that the other brother disciples were not as deeply knowledgeable in classical music as Swamiji was. But their songs flowed with such intensity that they appeared to come from the inmost core of their hearts. They would also try to inspire other aspirants to develop that love for music. The Master wanted everyone to develop love for music so that through the bliss of music people would taste the bliss of divine love. All the disciples of the Master wanted this. Swami Brahmananda used to keep a few singers with sweet voices among his attendants. He loved them very much for their beautiful voices and liked to hear them sing. The monk who was privileged to sing before Maharaj would be greatly esteemed. On one side was the music and its sweet, charming emotion, while on the other was the profound spiritual mood of Swami Brahmananda, who would occasionally pass into samādhi. Those who were present used to be overwhelmed by its power. Indeed, such is the charm of music.

Sri Ramakrishna sang in his sweet voice three songs on the Divine Mother:

- 1) Cherish my precious Mother Śyāmā
Tenderly within, O mind!
- 2) O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless
child of bliss!
- 3) Behold my Mother playing with Śiva,
Lost in an ecstasy of joy!

The devotees gazed intently at the Master, who was absorbed within himself in a state of ecstasy. It is necessary to say something about the Master's singing. The songs which the Master used to sing or like were not one's of pathos but of joy; and he positively disliked those songs that contained words like sin or sinner. He would say: 'The wretch who constantly harps on sin becomes a sinner.' The unique feature of the Master's singing was that not only would he become fully immersed in the spiritual mood the song conveyed, but that mood would also be manifested through his entire being. That is why one cannot expect to find the extraordinary sweetness of the Master's singing anywhere else.

The Master's Mind and Body

The Master's mind and body had been perfected into such a machine that if an idea once surfaced, it would find its fullest expression. As long as a child remains innocent, any idea entering its mind becomes manifest through its entire body. It is seen that if the child talks it talks through its whole body. This was also the case with the Master. Whenever a thought or a mood of any god or goddess would surface in his mind, his entire being would be influenced by it. There are references to many such incidents in the *Gospel* and elsewhere. One such instance happened when the Master was staying at the

Shyāmpukur house. The worship of Mother Kālī had been organized according to his wish. No image was brought, nor was it decided who would conduct the worship. When the time for the worship came the Master was so overpowered with the thought of the Divine Mother that he was physically transformed into the image of the Mother, also called 'Deliverer of boons'. Girish and others then felt that there was no need of bringing a clay image for worshipping the Divine Mother. Here was the Mother, the Divine Mother Herself! Everybody then shouted: 'Jai Mā, Jai Mā' and offered flowers at the feet of the Master. He passed into deep samādhi. It was seen that any special idea that would enter his mind on auspicious occasions used to find its fullest expression in his physical form. On the day of the worship of the goddess Kālī, no sooner had the thought of the Divine Mother entered his mind than his physical body was transformed by it.

It has been said in the scriptures that an aspirant may partially gain such powers after long and earnest sādhanā. The term upāsana (worship) has been interpreted to mean that a worshipper who intensely meditates on an object becomes transformed into that object. Those who saw the Master confirmed this. It happened not only at Shyāmpukur but at many other places also. Sri Ramakrishna was like a perfect musical instrument created by the Divine Mother, every string of which would be in perfect tune with the spiritual mood he was immersed in. His whole body served to radiate that particular mood in all directions. Such a complete manifestation of divine ideas as well as their perfect expression through a mind and body is possible only in Avatāras like Sri Ramakrishna.

REFERENCE

1. *Vāgvaikhari śabdajhari śāstravyākhyānakauśalam,*
Vaidushyam viduśām tadvadbhuktaye na tu muktaye.

— *Vivekachudāmani*, 58

CHAPTER 45

The Gospel (March 11, 1885)

The Master's Method of Teaching

The first two paragraphs of the chapter under discussion are descriptive. First there is a description of the evening. Day goes, night comes, and the twilight that joins them has such a sacred aura that spiritual aspirants turn their minds to prayer and evening worship. Sri Ramakrishna said that one should cherish auspicious moments. On special occasions Sri Ramakrishna would be in special moods. It was evening. At Balaram's house too the Master chanted the names of the Divine Mother in a sweet tone, just as he would have done elsewhere at this hour. Everybody listened with rapt attention. So beautiful was the chanting that it seemed as if there were a shower of nectar. The Master's sweet chanting of the Mother's name had such an attraction that it touched the hearts of all the devotees. Those who heard him even once remembered it throughout their lives. Realizing this, M. said: 'This loving sannyāsi who has assumed such a beautiful form, is he the infinite God? Will the thirsty be able quench their thirst here?' Speaking about Incarnations, the Master had said earlier: 'God is no doubt present everywhere and in all beings. But do you know what an Avatāra is like? It's like the udder of a cow through which milk comes. His essence can and does manifest through an Avatāra. There is the greatest manifestation of divinity in an Avatāra.' Only an Avatāra could be the source of the incomparable nectar he was showering. After the chanting

was over, the Master started praying like a simple child. M. was wondering: 'This evening prayer—is it necessary for this God-man? For one who chants the name of the Lord day and night?' Then immediately M. remembered another aspect of the Master—that he had assumed a human form to teach humanity. So the Master observed these rituals in order to teach mankind how to live and pray. 'Appearing as a yogī, Hari sings divine name and dances'.

Girish invited the Master to his house, saying that he must go there that very night. Perhaps the Master was a little reluctant, so he asked, 'Don't you think it will be late?' Girish replied: 'No, sir. You may return anytime you like. I shall have to go to the theatre tonight to settle a quarrel there.' The idea was that the Master could not disregard Girish's invitation. He was invited, and whether Girish could attend on him or not the Master would have to go. Balaram was preparing dinner for the Master, so he was asked to send it to Girish's house. The Master showed that he loved Balaram's food. As the Master was coming down from the first floor on his way to Girish's house, he was overpowered with a divine mood. The devotees used to carefully watch the different ecstatic states of the Master. The Master was overwhelmed with ecstasy thinking of Girish's great devotion. With this thought, he went into an ecstatic state and walked like a drunkard! Normally the Master could not walk very well and depended mostly on horse-driven carriages (the standard mode of transport in those days). But Girish's house was nearby. This time the Master walked so fast that others could not keep up with him. Any idea arising in his mind would occupy his entire mind because of his one-pointed concentration. The Master could hardly tolerate a lukewarm attitude; his attitude was 'do-it-now'. Throughout his life all his actions were performed in that way. Whenever he would think about something its thought would occupy his mind in such a way that it would not allow any other idea to enter. He was to go to Girish's house. That thought was uppermost in his mind and no other

thought could find any place there. That is why he walked so fast.

In this ecstatic state the Master walked past Narendra, but could not talk to him. Soon after, he composed himself and said to Narendra: 'Are you quite well, my child? I could not talk to you then.' Every word of his was full of infinite tenderness. He had not yet reached the door of Girish's house, when he suddenly stopped and said, looking at Narendra: 'I want to tell you something. "This" [the human soul?] is one, "that" [the Cosmos?] is another.' M. has not explained this in the *Gospel*. He puts the term 'this' with a question mark within parenthesis to ask whether 'this' means the jiva or individual soul and whether 'that' means the Cosmos. Do they mean the soul and the world? Is it Consciousness and Its manifestation in the relative world as an individual living being? M. was thinking: 'Who could know what was passing through his innermost soul at the moment?' And then he reflected: 'Or was it as if one had gone to the shore of the infinite ocean and stood there mute, looking on the boundless expanse, and had heard one or two echoes from the never-ceasing voice that arises from the infinite depths?'

Nityagopal

The Master reached Girish's house. Girish stood at the door to welcome the Master, and as Sri Ramakrishna entered the house Girish fell at his feet to pay his obeisance. Thereafter Girish took him to the drawing-room on the first floor along with the accompanying devotees. As the Master was about to take his seat he found a newspaper lying there. At his bidding it was removed. Since a newspaper contains worldly matters, gossip and scandal, he regarded it as unholy. After the paper was removed he took his seat. Nityagopal came forward and bowed low before the Master.

Master: 'Well! You haven't been to Dakshineshwar for a long time.'

Nityagopal: 'True, sir. I haven't been able to go there. I haven't been well. I have had pains all over my body.'

Master: 'How are you now?'

Nityagopal: 'Not so well, sir.'

Master: 'Bring your mind down one or two notes.'

The body cannot last if the mind always dwells on a higher plane. When ecstatic love for God becomes intense, an ordinary body fails to hold it. The Master said that Rādhā and Sri Chaitanya used to experience mahābhāva. Incarnations are able to withstand such mahābhāva. Describing mahābhāva as personally experienced by himself, the Master said: 'If an elephant enters a small pool, there is splashing of water on all sides.' Being unable to withstand the surge of emotions, the frail body of an ordinary person breaks down. But the body of an Incarnation is made of different material which can absorb the flood of emotion. We cannot conceive of such a situation, because our body experiences gross emotions and we do not have any occasion to be familiar with subtle emotions. We cannot even conceive of the force of such subtle emotions. Extraordinary is the intensity of subtle experiences! It is very often seen that, overwhelmed by intense grief, the human body collapses. This is applicable in the case of sorrow as also in the case of intense pleasure. Unless a devotee has a stainless, pure body, it is impossible to withstand the profound surge of intense divine bliss or of intense grief in the absence of God. That is why the Master advised Nityagopal: 'Bring your mind down one or two notes.' Nityagopal then said that Tarak was always with him, but at times he too got on his nerves. The Master gave an illustration: 'Nangtā told me that there lived at his monastery an ascetic who had acquired occult powers. He used to go about with his eyes fixed on the sky. Ganeśgarjī! But he became disconsolate when one of his companions left him.' The ascetic was extremely pained at the loss of his companion, and after that he avoided the company of others. It is not explained why the Master used the word Ganeśgarjī (the trumpeting elephant). We do not find it used elsewhere.

However, it seems to appear with reference to how the ascetic, alone and completely disregarding the world, used to move about like a trumpeting elephant. To be independent of others is the sign of a jnānī. He is independent of any person or object—totally self-reliant and free from any relationship.

Divine Communion

While speaking the Master suddenly went into an ecstatic mood. Strange thoughts seemed to stir his mind and he remained speechless. After a while he said: 'Art Thou come? I too am here.' M. thought: 'Who will pretend to fathom this mystery? Is this the language of the gods?' M. did not try to explain his words. We may err by imputing our own ideas if we try to explain this.

Do the words mean that Sri Ramakrishna was not alone but had come with his associates? Is that the reason why he said: 'Art Thou come? I am too here'? The Master said elsewhere: 'When you pull one part of the Kalmī* creeper, all the branches come toward you.'

We learn from the description in *The Great Master* about the wonderful vision of the Master: '... In the realm of the Indivisible ... I saw seven wise rishis having bodies consisting of divine light seated there in samādhi. ... I saw before me a part of the homogenous mass of Light of the Abode of the Indivisible became solidified and converted into the form of a Divine Child. Coming down to one of those rishis, and throwing its soft and delicate arms round his neck the divine Child embraced him. ... The rishi woke up at the delicate and loving touch. The extraordinary divine child then expressed infinite joy and said to him, "I am going, you must come with me!" The rishi remained mute but his tender look expressed his assent. As he gazed at the child, he again became immersed

*An aquatic vine that has many offshoots and grows in ponds. If one part is pulled, the rest of the plant is pulled along with it.

in samādhi.' The chronicler of *The Great Master* did not interpret the vision. The idea is, perhaps, that the Master himself was the divine child and had come down for the welfare of the world. Swamiji was to come as his helper in the task, and that was the message the child conveyed to the sage Nara. In fact, the chronicler of *The Great Master* described the divine child in wonderfully poetic language.

An undifferentiated mass of that 'Abode of the Indivisible' solidified to form a child. The idea is beyond ordinary human intelligence. As the divine child urged the meditating rishi to come with him he smiled to convey his agreement and plunged into samādhi again. The idea is: who can disregard such an irresistible call? The overpowering attraction of the divine child interrupted even the meditation of the rishi in samādhi, and made him follow the divine child, forsaking the bliss of samādhi. The call is simple enough: 'I am going, and you must follow me.' No question is asked like, 'Will you please come?' It is like a small child asking for the moon. No one can question the whim. Whatever is said has to be followed. The rishi was rather compelled to agree to the loving command of the divine child. The touch of love interrupted his meditation, and he plunged into samādhi again. This explains what the Master said: 'When you pull one part of the Kalmī creeper, all the branches come toward you.' Whenever He comes He brings others along. Here addressing one of them, he said: 'Art Thou come? I too am here.' His intention is to begin yet another round of divine sport, as long as he does not leave the physical body.

M. said: 'Who will pretend to fathom this mystery? Is this the language of the gods?' The language of the gods means it is beyond ordinary human intelligence. We fail to grasp its meaning with our limited mundane intellect. Those who live in that state of realization alone can understand its meaning. Others can only make guesses, some of which may be correct while others may be wrong. M. also did not explain the meaning of the words "This" is one and "that" is another.'

The Seer and the Seen

To a jñānī the seer and the seen appear as separate. He never mixes up the two. The seer is seen only as a 'seer', while the seen is only the 'seen'. Thus the words 'this is one', meaning the seer, and 'that is another', meaning the seen, appear coherent. The two are completely different. In the relative world we use them by mixing them up. It is as if, transcending the limits of this relative world, the Master said: "'This" is one and "that" is another'; where the two were separated and could not appear as mixed up. This could be one of the meanings.

Again, the Master also said: 'He has become all.' It appears that he was only seeing God. He saw that God was present everywhere in such a way that even in this world that is apparently full of diversity, there was actually nothing separate from Him.

There is yet another state where there is no diversity at all. It is the state where all objects vanish. What was there, remains. It cannot be termed as the 'seer'. Where the seen does not exist, there cannot be any seer. Nonetheless, when we try to explain the Absolute Principle beyond this relative existence, we say God is the eternal 'Seer'. We do not include the objects seen. We understand it in this way, and while trying to make others understand we separate the two within this world of perception, saying one is a seer and the other is the seen. One is the Principle while the other is superimposed on it. When separated, only the pure Principle remains. Nothing that is superimposed is perceived along with that Absolute Principle. The Master, by saying, "'This" is one and "that" is another' tried to teach the world that non-dual Principle. That is why he was, perhaps, advising us to separate Brahman from this world to realize that only Brahman is true, and everything else is unreal. Supreme Knowledge is attained as soon as the two are completely separated.

CHAPTER 46

The Gospel (March 11, 1885)

The Debate between Girish and Narendra

Sri Ramakrishna was talking about God at Girish's house, surrounded by devotees. Narendra did not believe that God could incarnate Himself in a human body. But Girish differed with him; he had burning faith that from time to time the Almighty Lord, through His inscrutable power, assumes a human body and descends on earth for a divine purpose. The Master wanted very much to hear both of them argue on this subject. He made them debate and offered his comments from time to time.

Refuting the doctrine of Divine Incarnation, Narendra said: 'God is infinite. How is it possible to comprehend Him? He dwells in every human being. It is not that He manifests Himself through one person only.'

In support of Narendra, the Master said: 'I quite agree with Narendra. God is everywhere. But then you must remember that there are different manifestations of His power in different beings.'

The Master's statement has a deep meaning. The same Brahman is immanent everywhere, but all men are not equal. Some have greater power; some have less. The difference is obvious. Sand is Brahman, and so are sesame seeds. But can oil be extracted by crushing sand? Brahman is infinite and immutable, but there are differences in manifestations in the

relative world. Such differences cannot be wished away. Though Brahman is present everywhere in principle, its manifestation is not the same everywhere.

Ram said: 'What is the use of these futile arguments?' Sri Ramakrishna reacted rather sharply: 'No! No! There is a meaning in all this.' He wanted the debate to continue. According to Girish, 'God takes a human body to teach men divine knowledge and divine love.' But Narendra said: 'God is beyond words and thought.' The Master reconciled this by saying: 'He can be known by the pure buddhi, which is the same as the pure Self. The seers of old directly realized the pure Self through their pure buddhi.' This is indeed the attainment of the Self.

Girish told Narendra: 'Unless God Himself teaches men through His human Incarnation, who else will teach them spiritual mysteries? God takes a human body to teach men divine knowledge and divine love.' The idea is—God is infinite. Finite beings try to realize Him with their limited intelligence. This would not have been possible if there were none to show them the way. He is an Avatāra who by his own example teaches that it is possible to go beyond all limitations, and who says: 'Look, that is your abode.' As extraordinary powers are manifested in him, he can show the way beyond human limitations. In the Bible they speak of 'original sin'. Human beings are said to be born with inherent imperfections, sins, or failings. They cannot overcome them unless someone like Jesus Christ comes down assuming a human body to show them the path. The Master expressed the idea more explicitly. Though an Avatāra assumes a human body, he is not an ordinary human being. By his extraordinary powers he is capable of showing the path of liberation to others. As the inner Controller, God guides us and directs us towards the right path. We, however, fail to understand the directions owing to our impure vision or mind. So an Avatāra descends to teach us the path through his own life and activities.

Viśishtādvaita

The Master said: '...Śankara's Non-dualistic explanation of Vedānta is true, and so is the Qualified Non-dualistic interpretation of Rāmānuja.' Narendra asked, 'What is Qualified Non-dualism?' The Master said: 'It is the theory of Rāmānuja. According to this theory, Brahman, or the Absolute, is qualified by the universe and its living beings.' Avoiding all abstruse reasonings and discussions, the Master explained the essence of Viśishtādvaita: 'Take the instance of a bel-fruit. A man wanted to know the weight of the fruit. He separated the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. But can a man get the weight by weighing only the flesh? He must weigh the flesh, shell, and seeds together. At first it appears that the real thing in the fruit is the flesh, and not its seeds or shell. Then by reasoning you find that the shell, seeds, and flesh all belong to the fruit: the shell and seeds belong to the same thing that the flesh belongs to. Likewise, in spiritual discrimination one must first reason following the method of "Not this, not this": God is not the universe; God is not the living beings; Brahman alone is real and all else is unreal. Then one realizes, as with the bel-fruit, that the Reality from which we derive the notion of Brahman is the very Reality that evolves the idea of living beings and the universe. The Nitya and the Līlā are the two aspects of one and the same Reality.... This is the theory of Qualified Non-dualism.'

Though Viśishtādvaita is in reality Advaita itself, it admits internal differences (svagata-bheda). Svagata-bheda means the differences within itself. To illustrate, a tree has trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits. They are very much part of the tree but they are all different from one another. The trunk is not the branch; the branch is not the leaf, nor is the leaf the flower or fruit. By tree we mean the entire thing. Likewise, Brahman is indivisible. All forms belong to It. In the Vedānta scriptures we come across mantras in support of both views. It is said in the Upanishads: 'This Self...is

possessed of all good desires, is possessed of all good smells, is possessed of all good essences.' All forms belong to It. Again it is stated: 'It is...soundless, formless, expressionless, and devoid of smells.' Thus, one has to proceed, discarding as 'not this, not this' the things which are not Brahman, to reach Brahman. Thereafter one finds that what was discarded is nothing but Brahman. 'All this is verily Brahman.' Whatever we see is Brahman—a follower of Viśishtādvaita enlists this statement from the Śruti in support of his view.

Different Interpretations of the Scriptures

All schools of thought, either Advaita, Dvaita, or Viśishtādvaita, have their basis in the Śruti, because all of them believe in the authority of the Śruti. It is indeed remarkable that, barring the atheists (nāstikas), all theists (āstikas) have admitted the authority of the Vedas. What is more, even those schools of thought which believe in the authority of the Vedas but do not admit God are called theists (āstikas). Sāṅkhya philosophy does not admit God but believes in the Vedas, so it is theistic. In the same way, a section of the Mīmāṃsā school of thought does not admit God, but it is called theistic. According to one interpretation of the Yoga philosophy there is nothing to prove God, 'As there is no proof, God is inadmissible' (*Īśvarāsiddhiḥ pramāṇābhāvāt*). Still it is called āstika philosophy and not nāstika philosophy. Not admitting the authority of the Vedas is atheistic. The above schools of thought admit the Vedas as authority, but interpret the Vedas according to their own line of argument. Though all of them are founded on the Vedas, each one proves that others are different from it. An Advaitin, a Dvaitin, and a Viśishtādvaitin all claim in their own ways that the Vedas establish their respective schools of thought. Having discovered arguments in support of their contentions in the Vedas, they attach greater importance to those arguments over others which they interpret in a different way. Every school of thought has done the same thing.

We Cannot Limit God

The Master presented a new idea: 'All paths lead to Him and all schools of thought are true.' That is, if we accept a path as a means of *sādhana* which helps us reach the supreme goal, it is true. This is the pragmatic view of the Master. According to the Master: 'All these are ways, but how do you come to the conclusion that the supreme realization you have attained through your path is the only supreme realization, while others are not? He is with form, He is formless, and He is beyond both. He is with attributes (*saguna*), He is without attributes (*nirguna*), and He is so many other things as well.' The Master said: 'Do not try to limit God. With your feeble intelligence do not ever think that He is this and not that.' God can become anything and everything. That is why the Master stressed: 'Do not limit God.' It would be improper to assume that the Master was an Advaitin, and that he only accepted other schools of thought partially. He did not accept any thought partially; he accepted all totally. And here lies the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna. It is not a stand one takes after being established in Advaita and rejecting others' views or at best accepting them rather disrespectfully. It is an all out recognition of all the views. It is said in the *Māndukya Kārikā*: 'Dvaitins firmly established in their own respective thoughts oppose each others' thoughts, claiming that He can become this and He cannot become that.' Here Dvaita includes Viśishtādvaita, Śivādvaita, Śuddhādvaita, and so many other schools of thought. All other schools of thought, barring Advaita and Kevalādvaita, belong to dualistic school of thought, because they accept more than one reality. Duality means the acceptance of more than one reality. It is Advaita Vedānta alone that does not compromise with any dualistic thought. But this school is not at all liberal. According to Advaita, all other thoughts are wrong, and therefore they do not argue with anyone. What need is there to argue with a philosophy that is wrong? This conclusion cannot be called a liberal one.

If we say that after a person realizes God, the Lord out of His compassion gives that person the knowledge of Advaita and thus he becomes an Advaitin, it hardly resolves the issue. That is because it implies that non-duality is the only true philosophy and duality is like a wayside inn where a traveller takes rest.

According to Sri Ramakrishna, with attributes or without—it is only God who is being enjoyed. He who is with attributes is also without attributes. One does not have to travel from the Reality with attributes to that without attributes. On the contrary, the Master said that it could be the other way round also. One can go from attributelessness to the state of attributes. It cannot be definitely determined which is the final state. There is no end to God; infinite are His variations. Though on an occasion the Master said that Advaita is the final state, he added elsewhere that after Advaita, something else remains. *Ajnānī*, *jñānī*, *vijnānī*—one may have heard about milk, another has seen it, yet another has gained strength by drinking it. Someone may have heard about Brahman, but someone else may have realized It himself; one has heard about milk, yet another gains strength by drinking milk. That is, by realizing Him as immanent in everything, one is established in Brahman. There are three stages—the *Brahmavid*, the *Brahmavidvariyaṇ*, and the *Brahmavidvaristha*. It is the same Principle, but infinite are Its dimensions. So the Master never said that 'One is true and the other is false.'

It has been said in the Bible that there are several entrances to the temple of God. After one has entered there, God is but one. God is one, but He does not appear the same to everyone. To one He is without any attribute; to another He is embellished with various qualities. He appears with a sword before one, with a flute before another. He appears in so many ways. His essence comprises infinite variations. The Master would want us to eliminate none of them but to accept all of them with equal regard.

We are indeed surprised at this extraordinary teaching of the Master. How could an illiterate person like Sri Ramakrishna make any conclusion about Vedānta? However, his conclusion is such that it resolves all the conflicting views of various philosophies. God has infinite variations and He is accepted in all His variations. If somebody claims that He is this alone and cannot be that, it only reveals his limited knowledge. He has realized God in his own way and not through other paths.

The Master cited the example of the chameleon. Those who have seen it hotly debate amongst themselves about its colour—red, yellow, blue, green, etc. Everybody's idea is true, but each one's experience is limited. Only the one who stays under the tree in which it lives knows that it has various colours—red, yellow, blue, green, etc. and sometimes it is colourless. He alone can truly explain because all others have only limited experience. Similarly Sri Ramakrishna had personally realized God in His varied forms. So he knew the true nature of the 'chameleon'. It is one of his most significant conclusions that one must not limit God.

Whose Philosophy is Superior?

We will not understand the full import of the Master's teachings if we try to interpret them in the light of Advaita Vedānta only. According to Advaita philosophy, Advaita alone is true and everything else is untrue. Advaitins say that this is based on their realization. Their argument is based on realization no doubt; but is a single type of realization good enough? And, can those who have no experience of the diversity in God understand His various forms through the process of reasoning? The dualists say: 'Non-duality is not the ultimate. That which is called "Brahman" in the Upanishads is but the glow of Sri Krishna's body.' What a provocative statement! Thus begins the dispute. Each one through his experience and through the process of reasoning realizes It as

either Brahman or Sri Krishna. How do we establish the supreme Truth—by arguing and quarelling? Those who argue citing the scriptures haven't realized anything. Who shall decide what the conclusion of the scriptures is? It is good to carry reasoning as far as it can go. But it is like a blind man's journey to Vaikuntha (the abode of Lord Vishnu) holding onto a cow's tail. While passing through thorny bushes his body gets scratched and bleeds, but he still feels that he is moving towards Vaikuntha. This is not the way. While reasoning, we should bear in mind that our reasoning is necessarily based upon our own realization and not on those of others. Of course, one's realization is to be verified with the scriptures and reasoning. Otherwise, one will have to accept the experiences of the lunatics as well. There is a beautiful saying: 'Do not try to understand through argumentation those matters which are beyond thought.' There are conflicting interpretations of the Vedas, so one cannot come to any definite conclusion through them.

We may recall a story the Master told: Once in the royal court of Burdwān there was a heated debate over which of the two deities, Śiva or Vishnu, was greater. Pundit Padmalochan was at last approached for the decision. He said: 'None of my forefathers up to the fourteenth generation saw either Śiva or Vishnu. How can I, therefore, say who is superior or who is inferior?'

Those who argue about God's nature should keep the above (Padmalochan's) reply in mind. Padmalochan said: 'But if you want to know what the scriptures say, it has to be stated that the Śaiva scriptures call Śiva greater and the Vaishnava, Vishnu.' Again, according to the Tantras, Śiva and Vishnu are two offsprings of Adyāśakti. What a disaster! All that we imagined to be true is turned upside down.

Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Let a person take recourse to the ideal he likes and realize Him through that.' After reaching the ultimate goal one will come to know that other paths also reach there. Though the paths are diverse, the ultimate goal is

God. The diversity of paths does not affect Him. He abides in His essence amidst diversity. One realizes Him in the form one seeks Him. It is like dyeing clothes in various colours according to one's choice by dipping them all into the same dyeing vat. In the same way, the supreme Principle reveals Itself to aspirants as their respective chosen forms. The Master's assertion is that all forms are His. No disrespect is shown to others. Everyone realizes the same God, each according to his or her taste—whether with form or without. The Master said: 'He can be seen in His formless state as well.' This is indeed a new statement, no āchārya before him had said this.

The Lord says in the *Gītā*, 'It is my path that men tread, in all ways.'¹ But it is hotly debated as to who that 'I' is. Is that 'I' the flute-playing Sri Krishna? Does He reside at Goloka or at Vaikuntha? Is He Nārāyana? If He is Nārāyana then which Nārāyana is He?—the one holding conch-wheel-mace-lotus, or the mace-lotus-conch-wheel, or the conch-mace-wheel-lotus? By permutation and combination several such forms are derived.

The Master's All-embracing Ideal

He is with form or without form, in whatever way we may want to see Him. It is indeed astonishing to find how the conclusions of the Upanishads agree with the ideas of the Master. The Master said: 'In the ocean visible blocks of ice are formed by the cooling influence of bhakti. Again, with the rising of the sun of knowledge the ice melts away.' He said further: 'In some places however, the ice never melts.' Thus, it is not that these forms are mere visions on one's way to reach His state of formlessness. If an aspirant sticks only to God with form, that does not mean that he will not attain Him, or that he attains Him only partially. Brahman is like the ocean both in its state which is with form or in its formless state. In order to touch the Ganges one does not have to touch it all the way from Gangotri to Gangāsāgar. One may touch it anywhere.

Owing to our limited intelligence we think that others could not have realized Him the way we have. Our ignorance only makes Him laugh and think, 'They think they have understood Me thoroughly!' Whereas everyone, including Dvaitins and Advaitins, say that no one has understood Him fully.

Everybody wants to bring others within one's own fold. But how extraordinary Sri Ramakrishna was, who enjoyed the bliss of God equally in all ways. Even where broad-mindedness is present in other religions, it is rather limited. But nobody is left out of the all-embracing love of the Master.

We should note this. Big or small, exalted or lowly, jñānī or bhakta—everybody attains immortality by drinking nectar from the same ocean of Brahman. Nobody has been able to know Brahman in Its totality. Once an ant ate a single grain of sugar from a mound and then carried home another grain. On its way back it thought, 'Next time I'll carry away the entire mound of sugar.' Indeed, the position becomes equally ludicrous if one claims that one has assimilated the entire ocean called Brahman.

The scriptures say: 'With your limited intelligence you have understood nothing.' He is infinite, infinite in all respects. So the Master repeatedly said: 'Do not try to limit infinity.' Having described Śiva in his eight forms, such as earth, water, etc., in the Śivamahimnah stotra, it has been said: 'Knowledgeable people may speak of these, but we do not know what else you cannot become.'² Thus, the Master has said that without trying to judge who is superior or inferior, one must look for the true essence of a thing without entertaining any prejudice. If that is not possible, it is better to admit one's ignorance about another person's faith without discounting it as insignificant. No one has any right to despise another ideal without knowing it fully. It is better to say: 'I do not know,' rather than branding them as fake due to false pride. The Master's statement that 'it will lack its full weight,' is significant inasmuch as God has various forms, and if one of

the forms is left out 'it will lack its full weight'. Therefore we must accept all forms, whether we know anything about them or not. The Master therefore said: 'When He is such then who knows how many forms He has?' We cannot exhaust His possibilities; nor have the scriptures done so. According to the scriptures He has infinite possibilities. Therefore, we may regard His infinite possibilities with due reverence and discuss this principle in all humility. The Master repeatedly condemned our 'all-knowing' attitude.

Dvaita, Viśishtādvaita, and Advaita

The Master started speaking about the three schools of thought—Dvaita, Advaita, and Viśishtādvaita, but ended up with Viśishtādvaita. He was speaking to Narendra: 'It is the theory of Rāmānuja. According to this theory, Brahman, or the Absolute, is qualified by the universe and its living beings.' This is how it got the name Viśishtādvaita (Qualified Non-dualism). It is non-duality of both sentient (chit) and insentient (achit). Or, according to Rāmānuja, He who is qualified by sentience is also qualified by insentience. Chit means sentience. The different living beings are parts of God, while the insentient world is another part. It is as if chit and achit are God's body. As I am inseparable from my body, in the same way God is forever immanent in all living and non-living things. They say that living and non-living things are His body (śarīra) and He is the indweller (śarīrī). Though Viśishtādvaitins believe in the one supreme Principle, they admit internal differences (svagata-bheda) in Reality. Things are different from one another despite being within God.

There is a philosophy called Pantheism in the West. 'Pan' means everywhere, and 'theos' means God. Thus it means God is everywhere. In other words, both God and His all-pervasiveness are admitted. Just as God is true, so His being everything is also true. But Pantheism cannot think of God independent of the world. Viśishtādvaitins say that He is truly

immanent in this world, but He is not limited by the world. As one Being, He pervades the entire universe but extends far beyond it. This is one of the essentials of Brahmanvāda. It is said in the Upanishad: 'Encompassing the universe from all sides, He extends beyond it by ten fingers' breadth.'³ Viśishtādvaita philosophy admits multifarious forms of God and considers all of them real.

God is different from jīvas in one sense and is non-different in another. To give an example, I live in the body but my existence is not limited to any or only some parts of it. Such internal differences (svagata-bheda) are admitted in Viśishtādvaita philosophy. According to Dvaitins, living beings and the world are completely different principles. The jīvas, the world (jagat), and God are eternally different principles.

Advaitins are not prepared to admit any diversity in Brahman. The fundamental principle of Advaitins is that there is no diversity in Brahman, the Supreme Truth. That which is not dvaita (dual) is Advaita (non-dual). Advaitins regard both Dvaita and Viśishtādvaita as dualism because they both admit Brahman plus some other reality. If internal diversity is admitted in Brahman, logically it amounts to admitting duality in Brahman. So according to Advaitins, all philosophies other than Advaita Vedānta are dualistic.

Against this, the dualists ask as to how the obvious visible world can be denied? Advaitins say that if there is a law that says whatever is seen is necessarily real then the snake seen in a rope should also be real. As this is not the case, there is no law that all objects seen are necessarily real. This is their first argument. The second argument is even more ingenious! Advaitins say that whatever is seen *must* be unreal. That is because the existence of a seen object depends upon a seer. If there is no seer, there is nothing to be seen. So the seen has no independent existence. It is dependent. Whereas the existence of a seer is independent. When we speak of the 'seer' we say so because something is seen. Does that mean that the seer is conditional? It is not so. If there is something before a seer, he

sees it. But it does not mean that if the objects seen are removed the seer will also disappear. The sun reveals different objects of the world. But can we ever imagine that in absence of those objects the sun will become non-existent? The sun does not wait for objects in order to shine, but the revealed objects certainly depend upon the sun for their revelation. Therefore, an object is dependent on a seer, whereas the seer does not depend upon a seen object. So there is no independent existence of anything other than the seer. Only the seer's existence is independent, that is, it has no second, and so it is indeed the only reality. This is the view of the Advaitins. Here the Master briefly referred to the views of different schools of thought, and his words were aphoristic.

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— *Gītā*, 4.11
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— *Śivamahimnah Stotra*, 26
3. *Sah bhumim viśvato vritvā atyatishtad daśāṅgulam.*
— *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad*, 3.14

CHAPTER 47

The Gospel (March 11, 1885)

Sri Ramakrishna was talking about God with the devotees at Girish's house. He told M.: 'I see God directly. What shall I reason about? I clearly see that He Himself has become everything; that He Himself has become the universe and all living beings.' It was the direct realization of the Master. Why should he reason about it? Reasoning may set others' doubts at rest, but one who has direct experience will never have doubts at all. Consciousness cannot be understood unless one has realized consciousness. About experiencing Consciousness, the Master spoke elsewhere: 'In that state God is experienced only as Consciousness, by man's inmost consciousness.' 'The knower of Brahman verily becomes Brahman'¹. Therefore the question does not arise of somebody knowing something else. If Consciousness realizes Itself then It can do so only after becoming Consciousness. There is no other way It can be experienced. When we try to understand what Consciousness is, we think of it as an object and associate it with another object, which may be the external world, or the states of our mind, such as joys and sorrows.

Brahman, or the Self, is not known in this way. Only if we become It can It be known. That is to say, knowing and becoming are synonymous. It is not enough to say, 'I see It'. One has to become That itself to know It. Then only do we have perfect knowledge, what is otherwise called 'the attainment of Consciousness.'

The Characteristics of an Enlightened Soul

The attainment of Consciousness is self-evident. But I cannot articulate my experience of having attained It; others will fail to understand. I alone can understand that I have attained Knowledge. Describing some of the external features of a jñānī, the Master said: 'Through this awakening a man goes into samādhi. He often forgets that he has a body. He gets rid of his attachment to "woman and gold" and does not enjoy any talk unless it is about God.' According to the Master these are the characteristics of one who has established himself in supreme Knowledge. Needless to say, it is too profound, too intimate, to be expressed. As Brahman is beyond expression, a brahmajñānī is unable to express his supreme Knowledge. But we can identify a brahmajñānī from some of his characteristics. The Master briefly spoke about some of them here. Passing 'into samādhi' means to be fully established in supreme Knowledge. The soul is firmly fixed in Brahman, or it has become like Brahman, or it has realized its oneness with Brahman. We regard samādhi as a state when the external senses cease to function. When the mind forgets all external objects and is immersed in the Self, that is the state when the modifications of the mind cease, and that is the first stage of samādhi. In the words of the Master, 'He often forgets that he has a body.' It is 'often' because even a jñānī has to interact with the relative world, so he cannot forget this relative world completely, as no interaction would be possible then. The significance of the words 'detachment towards woman and gold' can be understood from the behaviour of a knower of Brahman. Only those who are fortunate to have enjoyed the blessed company of saints established in supreme Knowledge may understand it to a certain extent. But this is rare, as without divine grace one does not meet such an exalted person.

From the little contact I was fortunate to have had with the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, I can say that nowhere else

have I seen people so often forgetting their body and senses. I hesitate to speak about this openly lest people think I am being sectarian. I do not claim that such characteristics belong only to the Master's direct disciples and to no one else. I just want to drive home the point that it is rare. While travelling extensively in India I have had occasion to come in contact with several saints and monastic groups; but I never had any occasion to see such total absorption which makes one forget everything around, even one's connection with the body!

Coming back to Sri Ramakrishna, his intention in mentioning these characteristics was to explain his own state so that his life could be a guide for others. Though we have not seen Sri Ramakrishna we very often witnessed the manifestation of those same features in the Master's disciples. Those who have read about their lives are aware how these ecstatic states used to be revealed in them on occasions. It is not that this would occur all the time. But as the Master said: 'He often forgets that he has a body.'

The monks attending on Swami Brahmananda would quietly keep a lighted hubble-bubble beside him. Maharaj would sit there quietly, still like a statue while the tobacco kept burning. The attendants were always vigilant and careful lest his mind be forced to come down from such an exalted plane because of the distractions of the external world. So bowl after bowl of lighted tobacco was supplied, but he was totally lost and oblivious of the world around! Regaining some awareness of the external world, he might take a couple of puffs. A wonderful scene indeed! A photograph was taken when he was in such a state. Once a visitor came and remarked: 'Ah! Maharaj has not been able to give up this bad habit of smoking.' That is what it looked like to him. Whereas his attendants saw that he was lost in himself. This is samādhi. Such a state of losing oneself with varying degrees of intensity was observed in all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. There was not a hint of ostentation in it. It was natural to them. It was just this state that the Master referred to when

he said: 'He often forgets he has a body. He gets rid of his attachment to "woman and gold" and does not enjoy any talk unless it is about God.' The Master described his own condition in simple terms that could be understood by all, and not like an analytical discourse of a psychologist. The realization of Consciousness is possible only after attaining Consciousness. Such a state is attained by one who has realized the Truth.

The Master said to M.: 'I have observed that a man acquires one kind of knowledge about God through reasoning and another kind through meditation, but he acquires a third kind of knowledge about God when God reveals Himself to him, His devotee. If God Himself reveals to His devotee the nature of divine Incarnation—how He sports in human form—then the devotee doesn't have to reason about the phenomenon and neither does he need an explanation.'

Knowledge acquired through reasoning is not totally free from doubt and leaves scope for questions. If a person tries to hold an idea derived from reasoning in the mind, that process is called *dhyāna* (meditation). In meditation the meditator does not become identical with the object which is meditated upon. The significance of the expression 'If God Himself reveals to His devotee...' is that this amounts to direct realization, which is another experience. Thus, he narrated three stages successively.

Reasoning and Knowledge

After that Sri Ramakrishna said that if God Himself reveals to a devotee how He sports in human form—that is, if the devotee has the direct realization—then he doesn't have to reason about the phenomenon. 'Do you know what it is like? Suppose a man is in a dark room. He goes on rubbing a match against a match-box and all of a sudden light comes. Likewise, if God gives us this flash of divine light, all our doubts are destroyed. Can one ever know God by mere reasoning?'

'Rubbing a match against a match-box' means performing *sādhana*. Any kind of spiritual exercise may be done—reasoning, meditation, worship, or any other process by which the mind is purified. To acquire knowledge by the application of these processes is the aim of *sādhana*. It is to be kept in mind that until one acquires knowledge through *sādhana*, one has not attained knowledge in its true sense. Maybe while in meditation the form of God arises before the mind, but that is not actual realization. Following the perfect stabilization of one's imagination He may be seen but this seeing is not realization. So long as the idea 'I see' prevails, realization is incomplete. When, however, God reveals Himself to the devotee, it is direct experience. After repeatedly striking a matchstick, light suddenly flashes. If one is blessed by direct realization, or if He suddenly lights the lamp, then all darkness melts away and all doubts are set at rest. 'Can one know God by mere reasoning?' This only means that reasoning has not yet matured into experience. In reality, reasoning is a kind of *sādhana*, but by pursuing the path of reasoning alone one cannot attain the knowledge of Brahman. It is one of the means that can show us the way; but it cannot by itself take us to the goal.

Sri Krishna has said in the *Gītā*: 'Not knowing My supreme nature as the Lord of all beings, foolish people disregard Me who have taken a human body.'² They are not worthy enough to know, nor are their hearts pure enough to realize the Lord. But when one attains such a state of purity one sees and recognizes an *Avatāra*, and then all his doubts are set at rest.

Kālī and Brahman

Narendra asked the Master: 'Why, I have meditated on Kālī for three or four days, but nothing has come of it.' The Master did not discourage him, but said: 'All in good time, my child. Kālī is none other than Brahman. That which is called Brahman is really Kālī. She is the Primal Energy. When that

Energy remains inactive, I call It Brahman and when It creates, preserves or destroys, I call it Śakti or Kālī. What you call Brahman I call Kālī.'

Narendranath had been a member of the Brāhmo Samāj, and the ideals of the Brāhmo Samāj had not yet been erased from his mind. Having come in contact with the Master, he started meditating on Kālī. As we learn here that nothing happened even after three days' of meditation, we are inclined to feel that we can achieve everything by meditating for three or four days only. The Master used to say that Narendra 'is perfect in meditation'. His three or four days do not compare with even three or four years of ours. This has a deeper significance. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to clarify Narendra's conception of Kālī, and so he said: 'That which is called Brahman is really Kālī. It is not that you used to meditate on Brahman, and now you meditate on Kālī. Your Brahman is none other than my Kālī.' Kālī is the Primal Energy—the Energy from the inception of the universe. It is that Energy which is responsible for all diversity, that Energy is the fountainhead of all variations. She who creates the world from its unmanifested form, preserves it, and finally dissolves it within Herself, is Kālī; and She is verily Brahman.

That from which this creation has come into being, That in which the entire creation lives and maintains its vibrant existence, and That within which it finally dissolves at the end to go back to its original unmanifested state, is verily Brahman. The Master called It Kālī. The principles are non-different; they are two aspects of the same Brahman. The active principle is Kālī, and in the state of rest It is Brahman. The difference lies not in the substance but in our outlook. We have given two names to It depending upon our angle of vision. Infinite is His creation. Somewhere there is dissolution, but a new creation emerges elsewhere. It is difficult to imagine the total form or extent of this infinite creation. Thus, we have coined two names—Brahman with attributes (saguna) and Brahman without attributes (nirguna).

The Master further said: 'Brahman and Kālī are not different. They are like fire and its power to burn. If one recognizes Kālī, one must also recognize Brahman; again, if one recognizes Brahman, one must recognize Kālī.' When the doership of the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction are attributed to It, She is Kālī, or Ādyāśakti (the primordial Energy). Again, when we conceive of It as static, It is Brahman. Fire and its power to burn are one and the same. When it burns something it is called fire, but when it does not burn then it is static in essence and there is no expression of its power. We have to infer the existence of power from the action. When the power is in its active form we say it is the burning power in fire. So Brahman and Śakti are identical. Rāmprasād sang: 'Knowing the secret that Kālī is one with the highest Brahman, I have discarded, once for all, both righteousness and sin'.

The Master also said: 'It is Brahman whom I address as Śakti or Kālī.'

Girish and the Theatre

The discussion came to an end. It was already night, so Girish asked Haripada to call a cab, for he had to go to the theatre. Sri Ramakrishna said with a smile: 'Mind the cab. Don't forget to bring one.' He made the comment to indicate that Girish was still attached to the theatre.

Girish was not that keen to go, leaving the Master, but his work required his presence. He was in two minds about it, but Sri Ramakrishna told him: 'No, no. You must hold on to both. King Janaka paid attention to both religious and worldly duties and "drank his milk from a brimming cup".' King Janaka acted wisely in this relative world maintaining a balance between knowledge and action. He held on to God on one side, and to the world on the other while enjoying his life in the world. The Master asked Girish not to give up the theatre, saying: 'No, no. It is all right. You are doing good to many.'

There are two sides to the Master's request that Girish not leave the theatre. At the theatre Girish was showing many uplifting stories through the medium of drama, and thus he was doing good to the people. Another point, perhaps, could be that Girish was yet to free himself from this conflict. The Master said elsewhere: 'When the wound heals, the scab falls of its own. If it is forcibly pulled off before the wound is dry the wound only gets worse.' Though Girish's mind was drawn towards God, it was yet to be free from the thoughts of the theatre and the like. So the Master advised him not to leave it.

The Master also wanted to impress this ideal on everybody. His advice for those who think of God while living the worldly life was: 'With such unwavering faith [like that of Girish] live in this world in a detached way.' But he said to his monastic disciples: 'You may wash a thousand times the cup that has held a solution of garlic, but still you cannot remove the smell.' He made this remark about his dear Girish. Perhaps the smell would disappear by holding the cup over fire, but the right moment had not yet come. The Master was waiting for the right moment as he would not let the smell of garlic remain in the cup. Subsequent developments in the life of Girish testify that the time was approaching to put the cup over the fire. During the final days of his life he could not speak about anything other than the Master. He would constantly talk about the Master's unconditional grace, his limitless love and compassion, and while speaking tears rolled from his eyes. The time, however, that the cup of garlic be purified under a blazing fire had not yet arrived.

Narendra could not see Girish's potential. He only saw Girish as he was then before him, and he said in a whisper: 'Just a moment ago he was calling him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] God, an Incarnation, and now he is attracted to the theatre.' But the Master saw Girish's future. Impartial, all-renouncing Avatāra that he was, he endured much of Girish's outrageous and whimsical behaviour knowing what his life would be like later. He belonged to the Master's inner circle of

devotees. Since the Master knew that the veil of ignorance covering him was slowly being removed, he was not in a hurry. Those who cannot look beyond the present, judge a person's whole life on the basis of his present condition. But the Master did not do that. So it was not the drunken, dissolute Girish, but a Girish cleansed of all guile that the Master loved so much. And the subsequent life of Girish clearly bore out that the Master's affection was not misplaced.

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Param bhāvamajānanto mama bhutamahēśvaram.*

—*Gītā*, 9.11

CHAPTER 48

The Gospel (March 11, 1885)

Expressing his innermost feelings, M. gives a beautiful description at the beginning of this chapter. Earlier the Master had made Narendra sit close to him and had looked at him intently. Then he had come closer to Narendra. M. said that Narendra did not believe in God assuming a human body; but what did that matter? Sri Ramakrishna's heart overflowed with more and more love for him. He touched Narendra's body and said, quoting from a song:

Do you feel that your pride is wounded?
So be it, then; we too have our pride.

The idea is: as the Master was not granting him a vision, Narendra did not believe in the Avatāra. That is why he felt hurt and would not admit Avatārahood. So the Master said: 'We too have our pride.'

Reasoning and Realization

The Master said to Narendra: 'As long as a man argues about God, he has not realized Him. You two were arguing. I didn't like it.' Sometimes he would encourage reasoning, and when someone objected he would say: 'No! No! There is a meaning in all this.' Again he would say: 'Can one ever know God by mere reasoning?' The idea is that reasoning is one of the ways, but it is not the ultimate way. One of the features of reasoning is that through this process the understanding of

truth gradually takes place. The Lord has said in the *Gītā* '... of those who debate I am Vāda'.¹ The discussion which aims to know the truth is called Vāda. Reasoning as a means to determine the true purport of something is admissible, but if the debate goes on it means truth is yet to be determined. 'How long does one hear noise and uproar in a house where a big feast is being given? So long as the guests are not seated for the meal. As soon as food is served and people begin to eat, three quarters of the noise disappears. When the dessert is served there is still less noise. But when the guests eat the last course, buttermilk, then one hears nothing but the sound "soop, soop". When the meal is over, the guests retire to sleep and all is quiet.' The Master said: 'The nearer you approach God, the less you reason and argue. When you attain Him, then all sounds—all reasoning and disputing—come to an end. Then you go into samādhi—into communion with God in silence.' The Master used to see God directly. So why should he reason anymore? When we directly see the houses, buildings, etc., do we sit down to reason about their existence? Our perception is so deep and intense that there is no scope for doubt. In the same way, when our vision of God becomes clear, it is so deep and intense that all reasoning and disputing come to an end. Thus he said, 'The nearer you approach God the less you reason and argue.' As a person comes closer to realizing God, his reasoning, doubts and disputes become less and less. In the words of the Master: 'An empty pitcher makes a gurgling sound when it is dipped in water. When it fills up it becomes silent.' When the heart is filled with the joy of God there will be no scope for reasoning or argument. It is not that the Master did not ask people to reason. Many times he would himself initiate a debate between two opposing views. He took pleasure in making Narendra argue with either Girish or Kedar, because they were all devotees, only they held different views. Narendra was almost an atheist, while the others were very devotional. There was a great divergence in their views. The Master

would act as a moderator and fill the arguments with his comments to one group or the other. He would never spare anybody.

We may bear in mind that the Master did not have any formal education. He did not study logic, philosophy, or other such subjects. Swamiji, on the other hand, was very learned and had a razor-sharp intellect. Still, with his comments on issues about which he had no formal knowledge but had merely heard, the Master clearly showed the depth of his thinking.

The Master's Comprehensive Outlook

Sometimes people would come to the Master and say, 'Sir, this is our point of view.' The Master would enquire if they believed in God. If they did, he would say: 'Then it's in order.' Or, at least if they had faith in spiritual life that would be good enough. Their beliefs were not very important; what mattered was their final aim. His all-embracing mind did not exclude even the atheists. Moreover, if people complained to the Master about someone who was a drug-addict or wicked by nature, the Master would not simply look at the present state of that person. Rather, he would consider his past, present, and future. He told M.: 'I know everything—your past, present, and future.' Bowing his head, M. acknowledged it. The Master added: 'Have faith in what I say, and don't ever try to reason.' At the same time, he said to Narendra: 'Test me as the money-changers test their coins. You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly.' He gave different diets to suit different stomachs. It is like a mother who prepares different dishes to suit the different tastes of her children. In the same way, the Master would give different instructions to people according to their individual tastes.

Being the Incarnation of the age, Sri Ramakrishna came for the good of all humanity. He could not restrict his concern to a limited few. He had to show a path that would not

exclude anybody. None must be left unfed. And this meal is not just pickings. It is a feast! During the course of a discussion a devotee said: 'Sir, you get crumbs or titbits at other places, but here you get a stomachful of food!' This is indeed the uniqueness of an Avatāra. He serves food in such a way that each one receives what he likes and thus grows healthy and strong.

M. wrote something more about how the Master would forget the external world. He had the deepest love for pure, guileless boys. He was specially mad for Narendra. The Master gently stroked Narendra's body and affectionately touched his chin, uttering sweetly the holy words, 'Hari Om! Hari Om! Hari Om!'

The Master's Spiritual Moods and His Compassion

One day Narendra said to the Master: 'The way you constantly think of me, you will surely end up like King Bharata.' Because he was always brooding over his pet deer, King Bharata was reborn as a deer. The Master then hurried to his Mother. Returning, he said: 'Ah, wretch! I will not listen to you. The Mother has told me that I love you because I see the Lord in you. The day I can no longer see Him, I shall not be able to bear the sight of you.' His love was not for any individual. It was for the truth that was manifest in them. The Master's love was directed to God alone.

M. wrote that the one concerning whom the Master felt so much joy, on whom he showered so much love, and whose sight made him often pass into samādhi—that very Narendra was not thought of at all on some occasions. The Master's mind was then totally immersed in God. As long as his mind was in the external world, what would it hold on to? To pure souls, pure-hearted sādhakas. The Master's mind was ever drawn towards that in-dwelling Supreme Truth. That is why, whenever he found the slightest revelation of that truth within pure, guileless boys, he would keep his mind in the

external world by thinking of them. Otherwise, his mind would not come down at all. Those boys were like the stairs to climb down to this relative world, and then he would feel the sorrows and sufferings of the world and show people the way to go beyond them.

One may think that when Sri Ramakrishna was so full of compassion, wouldn't the thought of the sorrows and sufferings of the world by themselves be a means to bring his mind down? It cannot be so because when the mind passes into samādhi, then mundane sorrows and sufferings do not reach that state at all. It is with some pure soul's support that the mind can gradually come down. So Sri Ramakrishna kept some pure-hearted boys near him so that, attracted by their purity, his mind would come down to this world. Otherwise he could not have retained his body. Sometimes he would say: 'Look, I am having great difficulty. It'll be good if one or two pure-souled boys stay near me.' It was not to serve him, but so that they could help bring his mind down to this plane. The boys would be those with whom the Master had a strong mental bond. The love for those boys whose pure, chaste minds were untouched by the filth of this world, and untarnished by any blemish, enabled the Master to keep his mind down to a stage just below samādhi. When his mind would return to normal consciousness, the sorrows and sufferings of the world would move him to an extent beyond our imagination. Everyone's sorrow would be felt in his own heart. To expand oneself everywhere, to suffer the pain of all, is possible only for an Avatāra and for none else. Others may feel sympathetic, but the way an Avatāra makes himself one with all and feels their sufferings within himself, does not happen with ordinary mortals. Swamiji used to say, 'I adore' the Master because he realized the sufferings of this huge world within himself.' Girish also spoke like that about Swamiji to one of his disciples: 'Look, how large-hearted he is! This is why I respect your guru so much.' One can clearly understand then how a grand, pure, and holy heart would

deeply attract the Master. Whereas we find that the Master once reproached even his dearest child Narendra: 'For shame! How can you ask for such a thing? I thought you were a vast receptacle, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man!... You will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor.'

We can guess the vastness of Sri Ramakrishna's heart from the above incident. That very Narendra whom he loved so dearly, whom he asked to undergo so much austerities, and whom he addressed as 'the ancient sage Nara, the incarnation of Nārāyana' was scolded like that.

M.'s Thoughts

The words of the Master discussed in the previous chapter gave rise to various thoughts in the mind of M., which he very beautifully recorded. The Master had said: 'Why should one reason or argue? One must have faith.' M. was thinking: 'Is it indeed true that God assumes a human form? Is an Avatāra a reality then? How can the infinite God become a frail human being? How can infinity be finite? I have had enough of reasoning. What have I come to know? I have not been able to understand anything through reasoning.'

Reasoning fails to strike a balance between two completely opposing ideas. How can infinity become finite? God's unlimited nature and the limitations of human vision are two entirely opposite things. In the *Bhāgavata*, Devakī says while extolling the Lord: 'That Thou, who bearest the whole universe within Thyself at the time of Thy cosmic sleep, hast been born of my womb is only Thy imitation of human ways to hide Thy identity.'² 'The Lord, whose vastness simply cannot be imagined, has kept the entire universe in a corner of His body maintaining them all at proper positions. Such a Lord has come as my son into my womb. Oh! who will believe

this? M. was thinking about these words of Devakī. He was well-versed in philosophy, but by applying logic he could not understand this: 'How can infinity become finite?' The Master had said: 'As long as a man argues about God, he has not realized Him.' Is it possible to know God with our small intelligence? 'Can a one-seer pot hold four seers of milk?' Thus, he kept thinking: 'How can we understand the nature of God with our limited intelligence? If the Master shows us the truth, if there is a flash of light, then only we can immediately realize it. This sudden flash of knowledge like lightning is the mysterious grace of God. One who is beyond all thoughts and words cannot be expressed in words, nor can He be comprehended by the mind. It is therefore better to take refuge in Him without making all these futile efforts. At first we fail to understand that it is a vain attempt. But, when we try to grasp it or debate about it then we find our conclusion is refuted by another's argument.

Reasoning and Scriptural Testimony

Even Śankarāchārya, who was vastly learned and had a razor sharp intellect, admits that Truth cannot be established by arguments. It is indeed a significant statement. He explains this: I am a great pundit. After elaborate arguments and by refuting others' points of view, I establish my view. Then in the future a greater pundit will arrive and by refuting my view will establish his own view. That is what happened in the past and it will happen in the future as well. So where is the scope to establish the truth through the process of reasoning and argument? Then what is the way out? In reply he says: Scriptural testimony, or the realizations of wise people as recorded in the scriptures. Experiences of those who have realized the Truth are proofs depending upon which we can enquire into the Truth. But even this is not free from problems. There are several commentaries and there are differences of opinion on the meanings of the scriptures.

Though the Vedas are accepted by all commentators, yet there are many conflicting views about their true import. The dispute continues even now, and with the appearance of new interpretations this is likely to be intensified in the future.

Surrender and Divine Grace

The Master summed up the position in a single statement: 'This is not the way. If He reveals Himself to us through a sudden flash of light, if the Reality is made known to us and reveals His real nature, then only will all our doubts be destroyed and not otherwise.' This is a very important saying of the Master. There is no other way by which we can derive knowledge of God free from all doubts. The point is: 'Can a one-seer pot hold four seers of milk?' Can a puny mind comprehend the infinite? Even when this point is repeated by the scriptures and saints, we fail to realize it. Our ego makes us think that we shall be able to understand it. But who is going to understand? We? Pray, with the help of what? Why, by our intelligence! In the first place, are we sure that the intelligence by which we will realize this is free from attraction and aversion? If it is not so and if our mind is inclined towards any particular view, then no other idea will be acceptable to us. Second, that which is beyond mind and speech cannot be forced into a particular mould that we can express. The Master's teaching is that nothing happens without divine grace. But on whom is grace bestowed? On whom will He shower His grace? What we can do in this regard is to try our best to secure His grace and employ all our efforts in this direction. But even after such strenuous efforts, when we find that we cannot do anything, we feel helpless. Thus, when our pride is completely crushed and a sense of humility arises within, perhaps that may be the time we will be blessed with His grace, and not before. Therefore, all our sādhanā is essentially directed towards crushing our ego and intellectual pride.

While practising sādhanā, if we feel that we are doing a great deal in this direction it will only increase our pride. But if we perform sādhanā with discrimination, we shall understand that however much we may practise, the path to progress is not being found. While practising sādhanā, if we feel that nothing positive is happening and that we are not progressing at all, does our ego get totally destroyed? If it does not, are we at least moving towards that end and feeling the insignificance of our sādhanā?

Thus, until we fully realize in our hearts the insignificance of sādhanā, His grace does not fall on us. As long as the 'I' stands in front, it blocks the entrance, as it were, of His light of grace. We have to destroy the fence put up by our ego through our sādhanā. The effacement of the 'I' is the ultimate goal of sādhanā. If we succeed in doing this, then to the extent that we are successful in this regard, we have progressed that much towards Him. The Master said in this context: 'The nearer you approach to God, the less you reason and argue.' By the expression 'reason and argue' is meant our egotistic attempt at reasoning through which we try to establish that there is none more knowledgeable than us. But the more the experience becomes clear, the deeper it becomes. Or, as one goes nearer to Him, reasoning becomes less and less. And when the aspirant attains the supreme Truth all reasoning stops. It is like the calm ocean in which not a single wave rises.

At the initial stage the purpose of reasoning is to make an aspirant understand that He is the Principle beyond all reasoning. We have to be convinced that in order to reach Him we must erase forever the idea that reasoning is efficacious. When the mind is firmly convinced that, let alone expressing Him in words, we cannot grasp Him through our mind either, then hardly any scope remains for reasoning. Then He reveals Himself in His full glory like a flash of light. It is, as he said, 'like a flash of light' because it does not come little by little. There is a screen all around and so the outside light does not enter. But when the screen drops the entire self is flooded with

light. Thus, the expression 'like a flash of light' means flooded by light. What we should try to do therefore is to pull the screen down.

Divine Grace

Divine grace alone is our refuge. And the only qualification to attain it is to surrender at His lotus feet. Unless we surrender we shall fail to realize His grace. So long as we do not open ourselves up fully, and pull down the screen of 'I', we cannot realize His grace. There is the Master's statement: 'The breeze of God's grace is always blowing, but you must unfurl your sails.' 'Unfurl your sails' means to cooperate with the Master who wants to take us forward. Sail means 'self-surrender', and as the sail is unfurled His grace will carry us forward. Then in a flash our entire self will be flooded with light. No darkness can remain in any nook or corner. There will not be any trace of doubt or disbelief. The supreme Truth becomes as clear as daylight. This Truth is not a part of Truth. It is Truth in its totality. The faith that God sports in a human being's garb is never possible without His grace. Without His grace we can hardly even imagine that He can come down assuming a human form.

REFERENCES

1. ...*vādah pravadatām aham.*

— *Gītā*, 10.32

2. *Viśvam yadetat svatanou niśānte*

yathāvakāśam puruṣaḥ paro bhavān,

Vibhatri soyam mama garbhagobhud

aho nṛilokasya vidambanam hi tat.

— *Bhāgavata*, 10.3.31

CHAPTER 49

The Gospel (October 22, 1885)

The Master Moves to Calcutta

It appears that the five volumes of the *Kathāmrita* (the original works in Bengali) have been composed in such a way that each volume is complete in itself, and so is each chapter in each volume. M. has arranged the events in such a way that a reader can get a complete picture in each chapter of each volume. In each part M. begins by briefly describing the place and also the persons who were present on that occasion so that readers can picture everything in their minds while reading.

The Master was terminally ill with throat cancer. He was therefore brought to Shyampukur for proper medical attention. In those days there were no cars, and most doctors would not agree to take the trouble of travelling by horse-driven carriage all the way from Calcutta to Dakshineswar. But where would the Master stay in Calcutta? None of his devotees had a house in Calcutta which was large enough to accommodate the Master and those attending on him. The only possible place was Balaram's house, but it was very crowded. Besides, the Master was used to living in the wide open environment of Kāmārpukur and Dakshineswar. He could not be made to live in a small place like a caged bird. That is why he moved to Balaram's house as soon as he stepped in the house which had been initially selected. Later a house in Shyampukur was found.

Recently that house has been partitioned into two. At present, on the night of the Kālī puṣā, the local devotees hold a

celebration in the particular room where the Master used to live because that is where the devotees had arranged Kālī puja at the Master's instruction. But then there was neither an image nor was the priest and the place of worship selected. So the devotees eagerly awaited further instructions from the Master. As evening came the Master passed into deep samādhi. The devotees were meditating on God in such a spiritually charged atmosphere. All of a sudden it struck Girish that the Master himself was Mother Kālī. Chanting loudly, 'Glory to Mother, Glory to Mother', he placed the floral offerings at the feet of the Master. Instantly the Master, filled with the spirit of the Divine Mother, stood up with his hands held in the position of 'granting boons as well as freedom from fear'. The Divine Mother Herself appeared in the body of the Master to accept the offerings. Even to this day special worship and services are arranged on Kālī puja night for the Divine Mother and the Master in remembrance of that particular day.

How Should We Live in this World?

In this chapter of the *Gospel* the Master was talking to himself, rather than answering questions of the devotees. Ishan was seated in front of him. He was a devotee and a jñānī; he performed japa, and he practised repeating the Gāyatrī and performed other rituals such as puraścharana. He was also very charitable and even borrowed to help others. The Master used to praise him very much. Thus, the sight of Ishan reminded him of the ideal of how to live in this world. He said: 'Blessed indeed is the householder who performs his duties in the world, at the same time cherishing love for the Lotus Feet of God. He is indeed a hero. He is like a man who carries a heavy load of two maunds on his head and at the same time watches a bridal procession.... Further, such a householder may be compared to a waterfowl. It is constantly diving under the water, yet by fluttering its wings just once, it shakes off all trace of water.'

The Master very often spoke about renunciation, but he never said anywhere that the householder's life was incompatible with leading a spiritual life or cultivating love for God. Of course, he did not reject the realities of a life in the world. He said that one was sure to drown if one led a worldly life without preparing the mind. Milk mixes with water; but if curd made out of that milk is churned into butter and then that butter is kept in water, it will not mix with the water. In the same way, if one's mind is well prepared by having love for God, if it acquires devotion, it will not be harmed by this world. The Master advised us time and again that the technique of living in the world was 'to live in the world in the spirit of detachment.' To develop this sense of detachment, however, one has to have considerable strength and needs to practise spiritual discipline. It is necessary to live in solitude—be it a year, six months, three months, or even one month. The significance of such varied options is—let the aspirant do to the extent possible for him. One doesn't have to strive beyond one's capabilities. Let each one prepare the mind to the extent possible before entering worldly life. Who thinks of entering worldly life in this way?

We take various steps to prepare our children so that they can attain success in their professional careers. But we never consider if it is necessary to prepare ourselves before entering the world. Besides earning enough money, doesn't one need any other qualification to live a householder's life? Parents, in spite of having experienced that there is no end to sorrows and sufferings in life without having at least a certain degree of detachment, do not pay attention to this fact. On the other hand, even if someone develops an inclination towards God by virtue of merit accrued in his previous life, he is forced to lead a worldly life.

Preparing the Mind to Face the World

The scriptures say that one must live a life of continence at his guru's house till one is twenty-five years old, practising

spiritual disciplines in solitude. Only after qualifying oneself, may one enter worldly life. The Master also advised people to live in solitude for some time, preparing the mind before entering the world. Due to lack of such mental preparations, the world appears to be frightening. To the Master, living in solitude did not mean holidaying at a beach or mountain resort, exhausted by the din and bustle of this world. He said that in solitude one should think of nothing other than God and how to realize Him. Otherwise, if the world preoccupies our mind, it does not matter what solitary place we may go to, the world will continue to veil our senses and understanding. Moreover, when we are not busy with work the latent tendencies in the mind will attack us with their full strength. Before entering the battle one must strengthen one's mind. All aspirants have this experience. Even in the lives of Incarnations there are instances when their minds became hostile. Buddha's struggle with Māra was nothing but his struggle with hostile forces in his own mind.

The taming of the mind is to be done slowly over a long period. God alone is everything—one must fix one's goal keeping this in mind. Without such an attitude surrender is not possible. Therefore, the Master's advice is to live in the world with the spirit of detachment like King Janaka. It is like breaking a jackfruit after rubbing one's hands with oil so that its sticky juice does not soil them. Attachment breeds anxieties and troubles, and also brings suffering. To live in the world and to be attached to it are two different things. 'Videha' (one who is free from body-consciousness) King Janaka of Mithilā, used to say: 'My treasures are immense, yet I have nothing! If again the whole of Mithilā were burnt and reduced to ashes, nothing of mine will be burnt.'¹ Mithilā means all the things which he feels to be his own. Even if all those were burnt to ashes, King Janaka would not feel despondent or become restless since he is established in the Self. The question of renouncing or accepting the world does not arise in his case. A brahmajñāni established in supreme Knowledge does not

differentiate between worldly life and a life of renunciation, and nothing affects his brahmajñāna.

The Master, however, added a word of caution: 'But a householder jñānī has reason to fear.' 'From attachment grows hankering.'² While living in the midst of sense objects one develops an attraction which then causes delusion. The mind gets dyed in the colour of the place in which it is kept. So it is not good to plunge into the world of sense objects just because one is a jñānī. In the matter of renunciation the Master never compromised. The only thing that permeated his life was God. He never knew anything other than God. He said on numerous occasions in the course of discussions, 'I swear I know nothing other than God.' So he never compromised with any situation which was opposed to God.

We must keep in mind that on this occasion the Master was addressing householders; so he primarily stressed such teachings which were suitable to them. That is why he said: 'But a man must practise some spiritual discipline in order to be able to lead a detached life in the world. It is necessary for him to spend some time in solitude—be it a year, six months, three months, or even one month. In that solitude he should fix his mind on God and pray with a longing heart for love of God. He should also say to himself: "There is nobody in this world who is my own. Those whom I call my own are here only for two days. God alone is my own. He alone is my all in all. Alas, how shall I realize Him?"'

These words are meant for serious spiritual aspirants. Ordinary people may feel scared to hear all this. Those whom we think to be so near and dear are in reality not related to us! Can we move towards God if such a statement frightens us? We like to enjoy living with our worldly relations in this world and at the same time want to have the bliss of God. Can both be possible simultaneously? That is the question. We think we will do both this and that, but that is not possible.

If we really want God then every one of us shall have to renounce totally—be he a sannyāsī or a householder. The

difference is that a householder may prepare his mind after practising spiritual disciplines for a while and then live easily in the world. Then there may not be any problem. But a sannyāsi will have to live the life of renunciation throughout, and the question of his leading a worldly life does not arise at all.

The Master said on many occasions: 'Why shouldn't householders reach the goal? Of course they will.' The householders are bound to the world, so the question often arises in their hearts: 'What will happen to us?' The Master did not compromise when he said that the householders would surely reach the goal. He never said that they would attain it even if there was no change in their lifestyle. He said rather that they must prepare the mind by practising sādhanā. The milk should not remain as milk. Only after preparing curd and churning butter out of it, could one keep it in water. Then the butter would not mix with water, i.e., the world. It would float unaffected.

From the very beginning we think we will live like King Janaka. He was a jñānī, but he did not renounce the world. It is certainly a pious intention! But the Master asks if we have observed the entire life of King Janaka. Have we acquired the qualifications for living unattached in the world which he had earned through his rigorous spiritual practices? We would like to live in the world without acquiring anything! In such a case our idea of living in the world like King Janaka is in vain. Ordinary people do not want to follow the Master's teaching. They want to continue to live as they are doing, and at the same time, want to taste the bliss of God. But that is not possible.

If a person wants to enjoy the bliss of God, he has to totally sacrifice himself at His lotus feet. But can we sacrifice ourselves totally? The Master says that through the practice of spiritual discipline one should prepare the mind so that it will remain immersed in the thought of God. Then, whether such a mind is in the world or not, there is nothing to fear. The main point is that the world is neither good nor bad. It does not

stand in the way of spiritual progress nor does it facilitate it. Life deals with us in the same way that we do with it. If we become attached the world, it will completely bind us. But there is nothing wrong if we live in the world with a detached mind. While singing we say: 'O Lord, you are my all in all.' Should this thought be limited to the time of singing only? We have to comprehend the real significance of the song and fix the ideal of life accordingly. He is truly our all in all—unless such a feeling dawns in our mind, it will never be possible to totally surrender to His lotus feet. So the mind has to be tuned in such a way that it remains absorbed in God. Even if such a state is temporary it is good. Once the mind is used to such thinking, the world will fail to attract it any longer. He is the biggest magnet and His power of attraction is greatest. Worldly life cannot attract people who are overpowered by the great attraction of God.

But in order to feel that attraction an aspirant has to work very hard. He has to practise severe austerities and spiritual disciplines. First, the mind is to be freed from thousands of shackles and given to God. One has to prepare oneself for fierce battles and then only can he or she step on to this path, and not otherwise. In order to attract people to this path, a person is told of covetable returns at the beginning. It is said that whether one starts repeating God's name casually or seriously, everything will be set right in time. While taking God's name in this way aspirants begin to understand their actual condition. And if they are sincere they will realize that the way they are taking God's name is not good enough. If they intend to progress further they will have to prepare themselves for more sacrifice and fiercer battles. Only when the mind is purified can it move Godward. But how do we attain that purification?

Life's Goal

First of all let us purify our conduct and let all our activities be such that the mind's Godward journey becomes

congenial. Then the question will arise: are we really making any progress towards Him? Swami Brahmananda used to say, 'After doing japa and meditation for only a few days, many people complain that they have not yet achieved anything.' He would advise them: 'Well, follow whatever I've told you for three years. If nothing happens after that, then you may come and slap my face.' He said such a thing! Why? He said so because we want to secure something without paying the price for it. In this world even a trifling object is not available free of cost. How then will we get the most valuable thing, God-consciousness? One must pay the price for it. There is a song that has come down to us by tradition: When the gopīs ask Sri Krishna to ferry them across the river, he says that unless they pay one lakh (one hundred thousand) coins, he cannot ferry them. Then the singers keep repeating, 'Leaving lakhs and lakhs of lakshya (goals), fix the mind on a single lakshya.' How many people strive for God with single-minded devotion? Single-mindedness cannot be achieved at the very beginning. So it is necessary to worship, praise, and adore Him, and also keep the company of devotees of God so that we develop some liking for Him, and thus slowly progress on the path.

The Master advised us to meditate on Him in solitude—that one should withdraw from the household environment and think: 'None is my own other than the Lord.' Then the mind will feel inclined to reach Him. Total renunciation is not possible at the beginning. Lest we feel scared to make any beginning at all, the scriptures have provided each of us with a path and shown us how to begin. They say: It doesn't matter if a person is entangled with thousands of desires. God is the Wish-fulfilling tree; He will fulfil all desires. When people hear this, they feel like making a beginning. Gradually, as they move on, their attraction for God increases and at the same time the bondages of delusion start loosening. This is indeed the simple and natural path. The bondages of delusion, which were once so dear, slowly drop off by His grace. The problem comes if we question at the very outset the worth of living in

this world without these bondages of delusion. There is nothing wrong in living in this world, but to live oblivious of God means there will be no end to our sufferings. The Lord has said in the *Gītā*: 'This world is transient. Having come here worship Me.' By worshipping Him we get something to hold on to in this transitory world—something that will make all the desired sense objects seem insignificant. It has been said in the *Bhāgavata* that the attraction of the Lord removes all other attractions. But one does not feel this attraction in a single day. It is acquired slowly over a period of time. And it can be acquired by a householder as well.

The question then arises as to who is superior of the two: a jñānī householder or a jñānī leading the life of renunciation? The Master says that there is no difference. But even a jñānī living in the world has reason to fear. 'When people parch rice, a few grains jump out of the frying-pan to the ground. They are white like mallikā flowers, without the slightest stain on them. Though the grains that remain in the pan are also good, they are not as immaculate as the fresh jasmine flower. They are a little stained.' There is nothing wrong in living in the world after attaining jñāna [Supreme Knowledge], because jñāna is not affected by it. But a slight stain persists, and that is why such a life is not as pure as a mallikā flower in the eyes of others. Of course, all this comes later. The Master advised us to prepare our mind, and he never compromised on this point. His religion is not like the latest fashion that one may put on to show society that one is a religious person.

Divine Discontent

The foremost requirement for the attainment of God is to shed attachment for the world. In the case of one who is passionately attached to this world, spiritual life has not started at all. The dictum 'Eat, drink, and be merry' can never remove the discontent of life. The attraction for sense objects may temporarily cast its spell on a person, but his hankering to

regain his true Self lies latent in him. He wants to taste ever-abiding, infinite, unalloyed bliss, and not just a fleeting taste of joy. Human beings cannot rest content till they attain that joy which is not changed by time, space, and causation. It is for this reason that even those who are called 'bound souls' have a desire for liberation. God put in human beings an element of discontent, Swamiji calls it 'Divine discontent'. This divine discontent forces a person to seek that unalloyed joy. In the midst of plenty, affluence, and happiness this discontent and restlessness raises its head. One feels: 'I am missing something. I am not getting what I am entitled to. It's not present in the sensuous objects all around.' An indescribable pain used to sadden Buddha's heart, even when he was living amidst sensuous pleasures of the royal palace. Gradually the pain manifested more and made him renounce the world.

Does that mean that everybody should renounce this world? The same old question has the same old answer: No. The Master never advised that. However, love for God and attachment for the world cannot coexist. 'Night and day shall never meet in one place.' Like day and night, and light and darkness, love for God and love for the world can never be together. One will eliminate the other. Attachment for the world weakens love for God. Practice of spiritual disciplines slowly lessens the attachment for the world, and then love for God increases proportionately. So long as this does not happen, a person will be tossed around in the world and made to undergo endless sufferings. Blows after blows are inflicted which may arouse a sense of dispassion, making us look within. God has made provision for that also. The mystery of creation ordains that no one can remain forgetful of his true Self forever. Sometime, somewhere, a feeling will certainly be generated within. Perhaps he cannot properly articulate that feeling or say what precisely he wants. But whatever it is, he doesn't feel satisfied till he gets it. This is indeed God's greatest gift to humanity.

We often say that God has inflicted sufferings on us. This is one of His greatest gifts. If we were always immersed in a sea of happiness, could we taste the bliss of God? Certainly not. We would be deprived of that supreme bliss throughout our life. If we look at the endless sufferings and afflictions in the world then we shall realize: 'Ah! How kind He is.'

Throughout day and night
 The sorrows that Thou gavest
 And continue to give, O Tārā, I've come to know.
 'Tis but your compassion, O Mother, Thou,
 Redeemer from sorrow.

When we accept these sorrows and sufferings as His acts of compassion, then it can be said that we are slowly becoming pure enough to approach Him. We should pray to God that our minds may be drawn to Him by any means, and that our attachment for the world may gradually weaken. Once this happens, the question of renouncing the world does not arise. He is the main thing. Besides, where can we possibly go after we renounce the world? As long as He does not completely fill our minds we have no other place to go. He is the only refuge, where all our sorrows and sufferings come to an end. The Master teaches us to pray that we may move towards Him even through all these sorrows and sufferings.

Sri Ramakrishna taught that one must prepare one's mind before entering worldly life. How many of us really do that? How many of us yearn for God? It is not that a person enters worldly life with a special purpose. It is the time-worn tradition. A person grows, marries, lives the householder's life, and dies. The cycle continues generation after generation. How many people are conscious of the purpose of life? For most people, life is like an aimless journey without any apparent justification. So we go on blindly. However, the Master was not speaking here of those people who follow this tradition blindly. He was speaking about spiritual aspirants who enter the householder's life for the purpose of attaining God. That is

why he said: 'If you enter the world with your mind prepared then worldly life will not distract you.' Also, he added a word of caution: 'If you constantly live in a room full of soot, you are sure to soil your body.' However, he added that such a stain would not be harmful.

For one thing, that personality whom he proposed to project before the world as a model was made perfect in every way. He cited the example of 'parched rice that jumps out of the frying-pan and looks like a fresh jasmine flower in full bloom' as the goal. In other words, mental renunciation is not enough. External renunciation is also necessary to set an example.

King Janaka

The example of King Janaka is often cited. The Master said: 'By merely saying so you cannot be a King Janaka. ... On account of his detachment from the world Janaka was also known as the "Videha", that is, one free from consciousness of the body.' For one who is free from body-consciousness it is the same whether he lives as a householder or not. This is because his body alone lives in the world. But as long as we cling to 'I' consciousness, the body-consciousness will also remain. As long as body-consciousness persists, it is necessary to discriminate between what is to be accepted and what is not. Otherwise, discrimination would have been unnecessary.

The monks have a different opinion about King Janaka. They say that he may be an ideal for the householders but he certainly is not an ideal for all-renouncing monks. Even though he was free from body-consciousness, he had to live a worldly life because of his *prārabdha* karma. They say King Janaka lived in the world. Why did he do that? He had no reason to live in the world. It must have been so decreed that those who live in the world could find a model in him. Āchārya Śankara speaks about him in his commentary on the *Gītā*: 'Janaka attained liberation by dint of his karma.' Regarding the

attainment of liberation through karma, Śankara had two interpretations. Who are those like King Janaka who have attained liberation through karma? Are they 'free souls' or spiritual aspirants? If they are aspirants they may attain liberation through selfless action. Here karma is regarded as a means to liberation and does not stand in its way. If that is the case, King Janaka need not be classified as a 'free soul'. Or, he moved about as a *jīvanmukta*, a free soul living in a body, divinely ordained to lead a life of activity. This would be similar to the case of Nag Mahashaya. When Nag Mahashaya expressed his intention to renounce the world, the Master said: 'No, don't renounce the world. Your life will be a model for householder devotees.' If everybody trying to realize God renounces the world, then the householders will feel discouraged. The scriptures have laid out paths for all.

Why would one who has attained liberation through *sādhana* want to live in this world? It is true that some may not feel like doing so. But others like King Janaka may live the life of a householder as they are divinely ordained to do so. A *jñānī* is always considered a *jñānī*, whether he lives in a household or not. The scriptures have said in this regard: 'How does such a knower of Brahman live? In whatever way he may live, he remains a knower of Brahman.' And the knowledge of such a knower of Brahman does not diminish in any way. When he has realized that 'I am not the body, the sense-organs or the mind,' how then will he identify himself with the body? By his alluding to the two varieties of parched rice the Master is suggesting: 'Try to become like a fresh *mallikā* flower.'

The Āchārya and the Ideal

Truly there will not be any difference as regards realization between the two states (of a *jñānī* leading a worldly life and an all-renouncing *jñānī*). But in order to become an *āchārya* or a teacher, one should be perfectly stainless. The Master illustrated this elsewhere. A village doctor had a

number of pots filled with molasses in his house. A person who came one day to be treated by him was asked to come again the next day. The following day, when he called on the doctor, he was advised not to take molasses. A person who was present at the doctor's house on both days said: 'Well, you could have prescribed this yesterday! Why was the patient made to return unnecessarily? The doctor said: 'Yesterday there were a number of pots of molasses in the room. He might have wondered why the doctor could take molasses, but he was being told not to.' This will not do. An āchārya has to renounce both mentally and externally. But an ordinary aspirant seeking liberation may renounce only mentally.

Then does one who renounce both mentally and externally does so in order to become an āchārya? No, he does not. The urge to renounce comes from within due to one's latent tendencies. The Master advised householder devotees to renounce mentally. If everybody is asked to renounce externally, there may be a repetition of the situation faced by the Buddhists. As all the followers of Buddhism wanted to renounce the world, the ideal of renunciation became distorted and corrupt. The tendency towards renunciation is not strong enough in all cases as to enable them to renounce everything.

That is why the Master advised householders: 'Exercise self-control and be discriminating while you enjoy.' But if somebody would ask, 'Why should one enjoy at all?' he would reply: 'There's no need. Don't indulge in sense enjoyment.' Thus, on the surface his advice may appear contradictory.

Once someone approached the Holy Mother and asked, 'Mother, should I marry?' The Mother replied: 'Yes, of course, you should. Will simply not marrying enable you to attain God?' Again another person said to her, 'Mother, I don't feel like entering worldly life.' To him the Mother replied: 'Rightly said! What's there in this worldly life?' Indeed, the statements may appear contradictory, but they are not. Depending upon what suits their stomach, a mother prepares different dishes

for each of her children. The scriptures are as beneficent as a mother. Therefore each person will find a path that suits him.

But one must not vacillate. If there is doubt there will be no end to one's sufferings. In the words of the Master, it is like 'a water-snake catching a bull-frog'. The aspirant can then neither accept worldly life wholeheartedly nor leave it. The scriptures discourage such a state of vacillation. Therefore, special emphasis has been given to the careful selection of aspirants. Even Śankarāchārya, who so eloquently praised the life of renunciation, said: 'If somebody asks to be initiated into sannyāsa, he should be told not to take it because the path that lies ahead is one of severe hardship. Let him stay home and realize God there. If he is still insistent, then he should be asked to go and visit Badrikāshrama.' In those days making a journey on foot to Badrikāshrama would have taken at least one year. The journey was very difficult and one had to live on alms. 'After his return, if the aspirant still asks to be initiated into sannyāsa, and he has been able to maintain his ideal unblemished and his spirit of renunciation is as strong as before, then, considering his qualifications on other relevant aspects, he may be initiated into sannyāsa.' In other words, the qualification of the aspirant has to be properly judged.

Only the worthy can enjoy the fruit of liberation. An unworthy person cannot. The scriptures have said that the path is indeed very hard. 'The wise ones describe the path to be as impassable as a razor's edge, which, when sharpened, is difficult to tread on.'²

It is not only the monks' path that is difficult. The householders' path is not strewn with flower petals either. According to the Master, it is a path for a hero. Is it easy to fix one's mind on God while shouldering loads of responsibilities and enduring so much suffering? The Master said, 'Shame on an monk if he does not fix his mind on God.' The Master praised householders who were striving to attain God while burdened with their worldly duties: 'Blessed indeed is the householder who performs his duties in the world, at the same

time cherishing love for the Lotus Feet of God. He is indeed a hero.' Maintaining this heroic attitude one should enter the world with faith in oneself. As a person treads along the path he should be firmly determined: 'I will reach the goal through this path.'

As the dark spots of the moon do not diminish its beauty, in the same way the knowledge of a jñānī is not affected even if he lives in the world after the attainment of Knowledge.

Then the Master said: 'Through perfect Knowledge a man becomes like a child five years old; he does not know the distinction between a man and a woman.' Once a bhairavi came to King Janaka's court. At the sight of a woman, the king bent his head. The bhairavi said: 'Janaka still has the sense of distinction between a man and a woman.'

Śukadeva and Sri Ramakrishna

Śukadeva is a unique example of one in whom all sense of distinction had been eradicated. He was a born sannyāsī, all-renouncing, and without any body-consciousness. It is said that for a long time he refused to take birth from his mother's womb into this illusory world. So God had to withdraw His illusory power (māyā) for a moment so that Śukadeva could take birth. But no sooner had he been born that he started walking away. Vyāsadeva ran after his son who was completely unattached to bring him back to worldly life. On the way some bathing apsarās (celestial nymphs) did not feel the least perturbed at the sight of the youthful Śukadeva. But as Vyāsadeva appeared, they covered their bodies and stopped bathing. Wonder-struck, Vyāsadeva enquired the reason for this. He learnt that despite the fact that he was a jñānī and aged, he had the sense of distinction between a man and a woman. But Śukadeva was free from all sense of distinction, so the apsarās did not feel ashamed in front of him.

Sri Ramakrishna himself is a modern exemplar of the truths recorded in the Purāṇas. His women devotees never felt

that he was a man. As the male devotees regarded him as one of their own, so did the women devotees. Can anybody feel shy before one who, like a five-year old child, is completely free from body-consciousness?

The Master once said: 'After realizing God, some souls perform work in order to teach men. Janaka, Nārada, and others like them belong to this group.' They lived in the world not motivated by any self-interest but to teach men. They were not content with drinking the nectar of divine bliss themselves, but laid bare their spiritual treasures and coffers of knowledge so that the whole world could share them.

REFERENCES

1. *Anantam bata me vittam yasya me nāsti kinchana,
Mithilāyām pradīptāyām na me dahati kinchana.*

—Mahābhārata, Śānti Parva, 17.19

2. *Sangāt sanjāyate kāmāh...*

—Gītā, 2.62

3. *Kshurasya dhārā nishītā duratyayā,
durgam pathastatkavayo vadanti.*

—Katha Upanishad, 1.3.14

CHAPTER 50

The Gospel (October 22, 1885)

Knowledge and Devotion

God grants the wishes of the devotees who worship Him as having a divine form and attributes. If we do not accept God with form, we cannot think of such things. No conception of devotion or devotee fits in with the attributeless Brahman. Therefore, the Brāhmo Samāj believed in the formless Brahman with attributes. Dr. Sarkar held identical views, but his path was devotion combined with knowledge where there is scope for reasoning and discrimination. He had studied science deeply, so his ideas were infused by science. He would believe something only after much deliberation. While talking to the Master this attitude was expressed. About devotion he said jokingly: 'Jnāna makes a man speechless. He closes his eyes and sheds tears. Then he needs bhakti.' Knowledge overwhelms an aspirant because he realizes the depth and infinite diversity of God, or, knowledge may cause fatigue to the mind and the intellect and does not lead him where he had intended to go. Then he is overawed thinking about the nature of God. Hence Dr. Sarkar says jokingly: 'Jnāna makes a man speechless. He closes his eyes and sheds tears.' The above symptoms of jñāna are manifested in him. So he says that one needs devotion. Thus the symptoms of knowledge are manifested first followed by those of devotion.

The Master used to joke with Dr. Sarkar. He said: 'Bhakti may be likened to a woman who has access to the inner court

of the house. Jñāna can go only as far as the outer rooms.' 'Outer rooms' means the extent to which knowledge is able to proceed through intellectual exercises. The 'inner court' is where knowledge cannot go, but devotion can. Where one has to go beyond reasoning, devotion has free access.

The path of devotion claims that while a devotee enjoys the bliss of God, a jñānī concerns himself only with external behaviour and fails to taste the bliss of God. It has been said rather humorously in the *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*: A devotee is a cuckoo that feeds on the mango sprouts of love, whereas a jñānī is a crow that eats bitter margosa fruits which have no sweetness. This is how a devotee makes fun of a jñānī. Again there are instances of jñānīs making fun of devotees. Finding the Master chanting God's name while clapping his hands, Totapuri (his guru) asked him rather derisively: 'Hey, are you making chapātīs* by clapping your hands?' He said so because he was yet to taste the bliss of devotion. A devotee is unaware that the attainment of knowledge has its own majesty and that too enables a jñānī to taste the bliss of God. There are reasons why a jñānī may fail to taste the bliss of devotion. A jñānī says, 'I am Brahman.' How can one who claims to be Brahman enjoy the bliss of devotion? Ramprasād says in one of his songs, 'Mother, I do not want to become sugar, I want to eat sugar.' Devotion enables one to taste the bliss of God. In the path of knowledge a jñānī does not feel any distinction between himself and the Divine. There the difference between 'You' and 'I' does not persist. However, in order to experience bliss there should be two things. A jñānī makes fun of a devotee, and says that he doesn't know anything but only cries with tearful eyes. Many times Swamiji also used to joke like this. Of course, Swamiji cannot be judged by a couple of stray remarks. He had an outer covering of knowledge but he was full of devotion within. Not that he wept any less. But he would sometimes say sarcastically: 'Weeping, only weeping! One

* A thin cake of unleavened bread.

must study the scriptures and deliberate on the Vedas and Vedānta, taking the help of Nyāya (Logic). Then only one can get some idea of the nature of God. But people don't do that. They know only how to weep like a bunch of Pellhads*.'

But the mistake lies in our judging another's path without having followed it. If one comments after following the path of knowledge, it might be acceptable. Or if an aspirant makes sarcastic remarks about the path of devotion after having reached the pinnacle of devotion, they carry some value. But comments made by one who knows nothing of another's path are absurd and make one a laughing-stock.

While the Master talked about knowledge and devotion in a lighter vein, Dr. Sarkar commented: 'All women are not allowed to enter the inner-court.' That is, there is no point in weeping with swollen eyes and exuberant devotion, simply imagining some relationship with God. One must reason and discriminate. Swamiji would often ridicule those who made an excessive display of devotion.

The important point is that how can we be devoted if we know nothing about the object of our devotion? Someone said to the Master: 'I do not want knowledge. I want pure devotion.' The Master replied: 'How is it? How can you have devotion towards God if you don't know Him?'

These words are very simple yet very relevant. How can we feel devoted to someone unless we know something about him? So it is necessary to know him. The scriptures also advise us to study and know the principles of sādhanā. The bhakti scriptures, therefore, recommend study and reasoning. In fact, it is only natural that as human beings we want to reason. A person may be a devotee, but he should still establish by reasoning that his path is sound. Devotion can hardly be sustained unless it is fenced around by knowledge. It is a matter of surprise that in Bengal, the land of devotion, Nyāya achieved its consummation and still wields a strong influence.

* The corrupted form of Prahāda, a great devotee of Lord Vishnu.

Though the old school of Nyāya originated at Mithilā, it attained its perfection at Navadwīp as Navya-Nyāya. Its extremely subtle reasoning was good enough to confound even great scholars. The scholars of Nyāya were not Vedāntins, but they were devotees. They even refuted the arguments put forward by Vedānta with the help of Nyāya. Then the Vedāntins disproved their arguments. Thus, a huge mass of philosophical treatises has grown. However, whether one is a jñānī or a bhakta, if one wants to experience the supreme Self he does not have to waste his energy indulging in so much reasoning. The Master said: 'One needs a sword and shield to kill others; but to kill oneself a nail-cutter is sufficient.'

Faith in One's Chosen Path

The essential point is that we should have unwavering faith in our chosen path. Some people are born with such faith, while others do not have firm faith even after reasoning thousands of times. Faith depends on the depth of one's spiritual attitude. If one is possessed of a pure mind, then upon hearing the words of his guru, 'You are Brahman', he will immediately realize the truth. There is no need for reasoning; one sentence will lead to realization. The Vedāntins say that if one really understands its meaning then that one sentence, 'You are Brahman', will make one a realized soul. This sentence, uttered by the guru, is simple enough; but thousands of books have been written to explain it. And even now there is no final opinion about it, because it is not easy to have firm faith. Therefore, in order to establish faith on a firm footing, the jñānis keep expanding their lines of reasoning, and bhaktas their books on devotion. But those who crave for divine bliss do not enter far into the intricacies of reasoning. We see this world directly before us, whereas philosophers say it does not exist at all! Hearing their view, do we keep on worrying about it and go on thinking, 'Oh! This world does not exist! Then what will happen to us?' Rather, we will say, 'It seems that the

philosophers are living in a world of fantasy.' In the same way, those who have unwavering faith in God do not require so much reasoning. They have realized Him and enjoyed His bliss.

Knowledge and Realization

There is another interesting point. The question has been raised about the way in which a jñānī interacts with the world. For the jñānī, this world loses its existence owing to his knowledge. But how will he interact with it then? Several books have been written on this subject by Advaitins. But the question has still not been clearly explained. Śankarāchārya has said: 'How can that which is perceived be irrational?' There is no point in calling it irrational. Direct perception supersedes reasoning. So the question whether such interaction is possible or not is irrelevant.

Direct perception is the main foundation on which reasoning stands. In the same way, one who has realized God and enjoys His bliss, either through the path of knowledge or the path of devotion, does not have to establish his realization through reasoning. On the other hand, He is free from all doubts. But one who is still uncertain and whose faith is yet to be firmly established, needs reasoning. In fact, an aspirant on his journey to God needs reasoning. But a person who has already reached his goal, be he a jñānī or a bhakta, does not require reasoning any longer.

We have heard about a jñānī sannyāsī of northern India. While teaching the scriptures, he would be overwhelmed with bliss whenever he uttered *sarvam khalvidam brahma* (All this is verily Brahman). His whole face would become radiant, as it were, as soon as he said, 'All this is filled with Brahman'. Such is the strength of realization. Only when someone realizes the Self can he speak in such a way. This is so in case of devotion too. Totapuri had not experienced devotion, and this made him joke (as the Master was chanting God's name while clapping

his hands): 'Why are you making chapātis?' The Master only smiled because he knew that since Totapuri had not had the experience of devotion, he could not understand.

The Master was established in supreme Knowledge, but he also tasted the bliss of devotion. Both states of realization were crystal clear to him and so he just smiled at the shortcoming of even such an accomplished jñānī like Totapuri. We might also recall the story of the chameleon, which teaches that God has various aspects. Only he who stays 'under the tree', knows that He is this, He is that, and much more. The Master used to say: 'Yes, God has form and He is formless too. Further, He is beyond both form and formlessness.' Why did he say all this? Because 'form' and 'formlessness' are mere words, which we use to conceptualise things. Whatever we understand about God through our intellect we express in words. But our intellect fails to realize the true nature of God. In the words of the Master: 'Do you know what a worldly person's idea of God is like? It is like a child's swearing by God while quarrelling. He has heard the word while listening to his elderly aunts quarrelling.' He does not know what God is, and has no experience whatsoever. To him 'God' is a mere word.

If God is with form, how can He be formless? Again, if He is formless how can He have form? The two states are contradictory. It is beyond the reach of ordinary human intelligence to understand that this contradiction can be resolved at a certain stage. We may at best stretch our intellect to its limit and such an exercise is not altogether futile. The Master says that a person may not know the nature of God, or the supreme Self. He may not have the faculty of reasoning either. But if he has devotion he can realize the Self with its help.

One day Sri Chaitanya saw a man reading the *Gītā*, and another person seated beside him was weeping bitterly while listening. Sri Chaitanya asked: 'Why do you weep? Do you understand this?' The man said: 'No, revered sir, I don't understand a word of the text. I see Arjuna's chariot before me.

I see Lord Krishna and Arjuna seated in it, talking. I see this and weep.' He was blessed with God's vision because of his devotion. Again, a scholar may go on discussing and elaborating on the *Gītā* with the support of subtle arguments and reasoning, but still he may fail to realize anything. When devotion becomes deep, it takes the aspirant to his goal. The Master said that a person wishing to go east wandered off towards the west. Then someone gave him the right directions, saying: 'This is not the right path. Follow that one.' Then he went the right way. But one should have sincerity. If one is really earnest in his search for the supreme Self he will slowly reach the goal despite the mistakes he may make along the way. Again, it is not correct to assume that reasoning is necessarily infallible. Reasoning can make 'yes' appear to be 'no' and 'no' seem like 'yes'. The process of reasoning itself may be fallacious, or the exercise may not be meant to understand the truth. Reasoning may help us reach the supreme Self, but one cannot fully depend on it.

The Master said that a person had strayed from the right path, but as soon as he realized his mistake he proceeded in the right direction. Dr. Sarkar commented: 'But the devotee in his ignorance did lose his way.' The Master assured: 'Yes, such a thing happens, no doubt. But a man reaches the goal in the end.' Indeed, it has been said earlier that even a jñānī may stray from his path. So that is not the issue. Besides, the Master said something very important: 'You may be a devotee, it is true, but why should you also be a fool?' It is not necessary that a person should lose his faculty of reasoning and discrimination if he wants to become a devotee .

Introspection

We think we are moving towards God because we are counting beads or sitting with our eyes shut. But do we really try to ascertain whether we are progressing? The Master said: 'Suppose you are husking paddy.... Every now and then you

have to take the rice in your hand to see how clean it is.' While practising spiritual discipline we should examine ourselves and make sure we are on the right path. To say that we should simply go on practising without any introspection is not reasonable. We must have some idea about God-realization and we should review our progress with reference to it. If we are really making progress the goal will seem to be nearer. The gopīs were searching for Sri Krishna. One of them said, 'Look, he must have gone this way, because we find here his fragrance.' This 'finding the fragrance' or divine smell means that we are progressing towards the goal. Without introspection we cannot really know if we are making any progress or not. Here lies the justification for introspection. Only if we have renunciation and discrimination shall we be able to know the truth. Otherwise mere reasoning is futile. The Master said: 'If I see that a scholar has no discrimination and renunciation, I regard him as worthless straw.'

God's Diversity

The Master said to Dr. Sarkar: '... It is extremely difficult to understand this. Naturally the doubt arises in the mind: If God is formless, how then can he have form? Further, if He has a form, why does He have so many forms?' Dr. Sarkar used to make remarks during the conversation. The Master would discuss those points if they had any worth; otherwise he disregarded them. He concluded by saying: 'These things do not become clear until one has realized God.' God appears before an aspirant in different forms and in different ways. The Master cited the wonderful example of a man with a tub of dye. He used to dye peoples' clothes whatever colour they wanted by dipping them all in the same tub. In other words, God blesses His devotees in various ways, and in whichever way the devotee desires. And if one desires to realize Him as formless, He grants that also. His diversity is not comprehensible through one's intellect; it is something to be felt

within. Only those who have realized Him, not only in one form but in various forms, can say this. By citing the example of the chameleon the Master shows us that until one realizes all His various aspects, one remains imperfect. The Master said that Totapuri had attained the supreme realization of Brahman; he had the experience of nirvikalpa samādhi, but he was totally ignorant of the diverse forms of God which were realized by the devotees. This changed, however, after he came in contact with the Master. Such shortcomings are natural whether one is a jñānī or a bhakta. A bhakta says that a jñānī views God from a distance and is therefore unable to see His diversity. It is stated in the *Chaitanya Charitāmrita* that from a distance the sun appears to be a fire-ball, but diversity exists within it. On the other hand, a jñānī says that the vision of a bhakta is incomplete. Actually these shortcomings are only due to the limitations of human intelligence.

Sri Ramakrishna thus says that it is good enough if we can enjoy any one form of God and attain fulfillment. But we must examine other paths before passing any opinion about them. The Master says again and again: 'Be faithful to your own path, but be respectful towards others' faiths, or else admit your ignorance. Do not indulge in useless criticism about others' paths.'

CHAPTER 51

The Gospel (October 22, 1885)

Sri Ramakrishna was ceaselessly talking about God at the Shyampukur house. While discussing the contradiction between God with form and God without form, the Master touched on a deeper area of philosophy. He said: '...As a result of the discrimination that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory, the aspirant goes into samādhi. Then, for him, the forms or attributes of God disappear altogether.' That is to say, the form enters the formless. Jñānīs and yogīs differ regarding the attainment of samādhi through the process of discrimination. As in the state of deep sleep or swoon, so also in the state of samādhi, all external functions in human beings cease, and the mind-body complex does not work. When a jñānī, through discrimination, attains the firm knowledge that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory, he is said to have reached his ultimate goal. A jñānī's goal is to attain the firm realization that other than Brahman everything else is unreal. Thus, one does not have to realize Brahman separately because Brahman is our very essence. The jñānī achieves his end when he realizes that all superimpositions on Brahman are unreal. However, it is not necessary that the attainment of this knowledge will necessarily bring samādhi or that the aspirant's sense organs will stop functioning.

By 'samādhi' we normally mean bhāvasamādhi experienced by a yogī or a devotee. In bhāvasamādhi, when a bhakta completely merges his mind in God, all his external activities stop. It is stated: 'Yoga is the suppression of the modifications

of the mind.¹ When the mind is free from modifications, the body and all the sense organs become inactive, because having lost contact with the mind the sense organs cannot act. Yogīs call such a state 'samādhi'. The term 'samādhi' means to place, or to establish, perfectly.

The experience of samādhi of a yogī, a jñānī, and a bhakta differ and are not identical. When a yogī eliminates all mental modifications (vrittis), then mental modes such as 'I' and 'mine' cease to function. When these mental modes do not arise, nothing remains there to monitor the movements of the body and its activities. This is the samādhi of a yogī.

While contemplating on God a bhakta concentrates so intensely on the object of meditation that he can no longer direct his mind towards the body or the sense organs. So the body and the sense organs become inert. This is the bhakta's samādhi. The difference is that a yogī makes his mind free from all mental modifications, and a bhakta fills his mind with the object of meditation. Of course, there are also different stages in the samādhi of a yogī, a bhakta, and a jñānī.

The difference between the samādhi of a yogī and a bhakta is fairly clear. But what about a jñānī? A jñānī attains samādhi when he is established in the supreme Self. In his samādhi the feeling of 'I' and 'mine' towards the sense organs will not be there. In the absence of that feeling do the sense organs function or not? Answering this, a jñānī says that they may or may not function. If they function, it is the result of past deeds. These are termed prārabdha karma, the action that has begun to fructify, the fruit of which is being reaped in this life. In this state the 'I' no longer exists; even if it exists, it is there just as a faint shadow. A little remains because of past tendencies but there is no sense of doership for the acts performed. He continues to act but is not motivated by any 'I' sense. The Lord specially explains this state in the *Gītā*: 'He who has not the feeling of egoism, whose intellect is not tainted, he does not kill, nor does he become bound—even by killing these creatures.'² Thus, the state in which one acts, yet

does not perform any action is the state of a jñānī. 'He lives in the body but is not of it.' (*dehasthopi na dehasthah*). In other words, if we find that such a jñānī is engaged in physical activities, we say he is a jñānī who has attained the supreme Truth in this body. But 'is not of it' means he has no sense of attachment to the body, or the feeling that it belongs to him. He has realized that all these are illusory. The firm conviction that the world is unreal is the result of Knowledge. We term this Brahmasākshātkāra. But the expression is faulty as it stands. Were it possible to see Brahman in the ordinary way, as we see other things of the world, we may say that it is Brahmasākshātkāra. But this is not exactly the case. Literally, the term Brahmasākshātkāra means seeing Brahman in the same way as we see other objects. This implies that Brahman is brought within the scope of the sense organs. Here eye represents all the organs of knowledge and not just the physical eye. And the knowledge gained through them is called 'cognition'. But Brahman is not an external object like a pot that is seen by the sense organs. So by the term Brahmasākshātkāra, we have to understand that no medium or faculty is there for the realization of Brahman. When we see an object with our eyes we establish contact with the object, and that contact then generates an impression in the mind. Finally, when that impression is illumined by the light of the Self we perceive the object. This is the process of cognition according to philosophers. Thus, for seeing any object, besides the mind and the sense organs, there is a need for other supporting factors like light, physical capability, etc. Without these supporting factors no object can be seen.

But how does Brahmasākshātkāra take place? Here Brahman is realized directly. It is not that this realization occurs behind a curtain or through some intermediary. The realization of one's own Self—which in the words of the Master is, 'Consciousness experienced by the inmost consciousness'—is Brahmasākshātkāra. In such a state a jñānī passes into samādhi, but it is not necessary that this realization will bring

about the cessation of physical activities. If his body continues to act, and if the jñānī does not attach his ego to it, he is still in the state of samādhi. In such a state he is free from the sense of 'I', but his body may be active. This is the samādhi of a jñānī.

Well, what is a bhakta's samādhi like? A bhakta is in samādhi when his mind does not move to any object other than the one on which it is concentrated. This samādhi has three stages—bāhyadaśā, ardhabāhyadaśā, and the antardaśā. When the mind of the bhakta is totally fixed on God and his actions are controlled only by Him, he is in the state of bāhyadaśā. When his external activities are virtually suspended but he is yet to lose awareness of the external world, it is ardhabāhyadaśā. At this time his mind is mostly indrawn, but a small amount of external consciousness still remains. In the next stage, antardaśā, all external awareness is gone. Though the state closely resembles the samādhi of a yogī, it has some differences. That is because a bhakta does not worship the formless, attributeless Brahman. He worships the Personal God (Īśvara) with attributes. Even if he worships God without attributes, he never worships with the intention of completely merging himself in the Divine.

God and the Devotee

From what the Master says, (as quoted in the beginning of this chapter) when an aspirant goes into samādhi, or, if his mind is firmly established in God, then the forms and attributes of God vanish. He will then be convinced of their unreality and will not feel that God is a person. This is truly a subtle philosophical concept. A devotee meditates and thinks of God as a Person. A personality is something that separates a person from others and draws a fence around him, as it were. So long as we regard God as separate from us, He is possessed of that distinctive personality. But when nothing is perceived other than God, then His personality also disappears. God is considered as the Supreme Lord or Controller. Being the

Controller of the world He is a Person because He is separate from what He controls. Now, if there is nothing called the world at all, what will He control? Where will His attributes go? So He is no longer God as is generally understood, nor can He be called a Person.

Naturally the question arises: what is He then? If the attributes of God are not applicable to Him, then how do we describe Him? We normally describe Him in this way: He is all-pervasive, He is immanent in everything, He is guiding everybody, and so on. If these attributes are negated then how do we realize Him? And how can we describe Him at all?

The Master replied: 'What He is cannot be described in words. And who will describe it? He who is to describe does not exist at all; he no longer finds his "I"'. In this context the Master's beautiful example of the salt doll going to measure the ocean is very apt. The salt doll is made of salt, and the ocean also has salt. Both of them are similar in essence yet different. At one place the salt is pervading a liquid, while at another place it has assumed a solid shape. Now the salt doll, which is limited by its form, goes to measure the formless ocean. As it enters the ocean it melts; it cannot retain its individual existence. Who then is to report about the depth, length, and width of the ocean? With our finite personality we are trying to understand that Principle, our Creator and Controller, in order to arrive at the truth about Him. But during our investigation the notion of our own self undergoes a change. The change continues until we reach a state where our 'I' consciousness finally dissolves. Who then is left to discuss the nature of Brahman?

'A knower of Brahman verily becomes Brahman.' This statement deserves to be seriously examined. Does the word 'becomes' mean changing into the form of Brahman? No, not that. In essence that person is Brahman, but for so long he has thought of himself as an individual separate from Him and has contemplated on God as different from him. His contemplation eventually purifies his mind, changes his personality, and

simultaneously his understanding of God also changes. Gradually a stage comes when his individual personality disappears. No longer can he think of God apart from himself. Thus 'one becomes Brahman' means he remains what he was and does not undergo any change. Only the cover that made him think of himself as different from God is removed, and his illusion of separateness goes away. Then who is to determine the nature of God? That is why it has been said that nobody can describe what Brahman is. He who is to describe does not exist at all. If there were describable attributes in Brahman, He would have become a Person. There are certain attributes by which we identify a person as distinct and separate from others. But when all attributes and qualities become non-existent then nothing is left to separate one from others. How then is it possible to describe Him?

Brahman is Beyond Words

It is for this reason that both the Master and the scriptures repeatedly say: 'That which is soundless, touchless, formless, and odourless, that which is eternal, undecaying...' ³ All the attributes of Brahman are stated in a negative way—He is not this, He is not that, He cannot be perceived by the sense organs nor by the intellect and so on. Then what is He? As it is not possible to express Him in words, He is described as the substratum of all cognizable substances. Again, if cognizable substances are considered unreal, He is also the substratum of unreality. Without admitting of any such substratum where an illusion rests, it is not possible to admit any illusion. As for example: the snake is an illusion. But where does the illusion occur? It occurs on a piece of rope. So the piece of rope is the substratum on which the illusion of snake is superimposed. In the same way, on what does the illusion in the form of this world rest? We use a word 'Brahman', which means all-pervasiveness. In other words, wherever we witness such illusion the basis is but one and the same. Therefore He

pervades all illusions. Indeed, this is His pervasiveness. It has no independent existence. Its extent is relative to that of the illusion. Thus pervasiveness is superimposed on It. A jñānī knows the principle on which this superimposition is made. What does that mean? It means a jñānī knows that all attributes are but superimpositions. He does not need to know the basis afresh. No knowledge of superimposition is possible without the knowledge of the substratum. For instance, the knowledge of a snake is not possible without the knowledge of the rope. He who does not see the rope does not see the snake either. We call it an illusion when somebody sees a piece of rope not as a rope but as a snake, and similarly, when someone sees Brahman not as Brahman but as the world. Had it been possible to merge the world in Brahman the way the illusory snake is merged in the rope, then what remains would be called Brahman. Though this reality is called Brahman, it does not mean that It is an object denoted by the word 'Brahman'. Brahman means that which pervades everything. In the scriptures, all the terms like 'Satchidānanda' connoting Brahman have been explained in this way. So Brahman is beyond words. That is why the Master said: 'One cannot describe in words what He is.'

Consciousness Experienced by the Inmost Consciousness

There is yet another issue. If He is bereft of any personality and is beyond the cognition of the sense organs and the intellect, what need is there to admit of such a substance at all? Has anybody ever experienced it? No, nobody has. Therefore there is no proof that He exists. The Master replied to this question: 'In that state God is experienced only as Consciousness by man's inmost consciousness.' When the intellect is purified, He manifests Himself as the essence of pure Intelligence, and not as a object. Intelligence itself attains the nature of Brahman. So long as the intellect is tainted it stays apart from Him and fails to reveal His true nature. If we

look through a tinted glass we find coloured objects all around. In the same way by colouring our intellect we view this world, and its diversity, including the 'I' in us, as coloured. However, the intellect that remains after completely erasing that colouring is pure Intelligence. The expression 'Consciousness experienced by inmost consciousness' means that the Principle remains Self-effulgent in that pure Intelligence in total unison with it. No one can say that It is seen. It abides as the Self-effulgent One in Its own majesty. Unlike other objects which are revealed by yet another object, Brahman is not revealed by anything else. Brahman reveals Its own Self. And it cannot be objected that this being the case the revealer will be identical with the act of revealing, since Brahman never becomes an object, it is always the subject.

The Master here explained the most abstruse truth of the Vedānta philosophy in the simplest language: 'In that state God is experienced as Consciousness by man's inmost consciousness.' The mind and intellect are limited. And whatever is comprehended by them will be limited by the act of being comprehended. Is it possible to catch the sea with a net? The net rests in a tiny corner of the sea while the sea remains as it is. Similarly Brahman is infinite, and so It can never be comprehended by the mind and intellect. Even then, can we attempt to know Brahman without the help of our mind and intellect? Do we then conclude that there is no way of knowing that which is beyond the mind and intellect?

The Master's All-comprehensive Outlook

The Master said, 'Why should it be so?' The mind and intellect become pure while trying to know Him. While trying to measure the sea the salt doll gets dissolved slowly and it attains complete purification. Then its earlier existence—the finite existence which made it consider itself to be an individual object and separate from Brahman slowly goes away. Where does it go? It dissolves into its true Self. Thus,

when the finite mind transcends all limitations and attains its true nature, the experience is called 'Consciousness experienced by inmost consciousness.'

The Master would like us to understand it from a different perspective. He said: 'I have heard that there are oceans in the extreme north and extreme south where the air is so cold that it freezes the water into huge blocks of ice here and there. Ships cannot move there. They are stopped by the ice.' The cold is bhakti. At some spots water is frozen into ice. What is that water? That water is the ocean of Brahman. The cooling influence of bhakti freezes the water into ice. Water has no form whereas an ice-block has. Thus the Master said: '... Ships cannot move there, they are stopped by the ice.' In other words to a bhakta, God is with form and attributes.

Dr. Sarkar interpreted the Master's statement in another way and said: 'Then in the path of bhakti the aspirant meets with obstacles.' That is, his progress is retarded. The Master promptly replied: 'Yes, that is true. But it does not cause the devotee any harm. After all, it is the water of the Ocean of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, that is frozen into ice.' What is the ice-block that stops the ship's movement? It is but the ocean; the ice-block is the ocean in another form. So, when the ship is stuck, where else does it get stuck but in Brahman Itself? The Master continued: 'It will not injure you if you continue to reason.' Reasoning will awaken jñāna in us, which, like the sun, will melt the ice. Does it become corrupt in its melted form? Whatever was there in the form of ice-blocks remains as the ocean—both are same.

The God who is realized by a bhakta in His divine form with attributes is said to be formless and without attributes by the jñānī. The Principle is one—the jñānī and bhakta perceive It differently. Which perception is true? According to the Master both are true. A jñānī asks: how can a Principle that undergoes change be true? A bhakta replies that the jñānī's contention that anything that undergoes change is unreal is applicable to the finite objects of the mundane world. How can

one apply this rule to God who is not limited by the world? Therefore, the jñānī cannot disprove the God of the devotee through this analogy. The devotees say that they have experienced Him and are immersed in His divine bliss. Simply because the jñānī has not realized Him, he cannot say that He is unreal. The Master supports everyone, be he a bhakta or a jñānī. The dishes may be sweet, sour, or juicy; the Master enjoys them all. He used to say that he liked to see God in His divine form and again in His state of formlessness. He liked to enjoy Him in all His varied forms. This is the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna!

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Hatoāpi sa imāmlokān na hanti na nibadhyate.*

— *Gītā*, 18.17

3. *Aśabdamasparśamarupamavyayam*

tathārasam nityamagandhavaccha yat.

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CHAPTER 52

The Gospel (October 22, 1885)

Turning our Tendencies Godward

Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that 'men proud of their scholarship, proud of their education, or proud of their wealth' cannot attain knowledge of God. In other words, we must overcome these obstacles on the path if we desire to attain knowledge. To explain how different qualities breed pride, the Master said: 'A characteristic of *tamas* is pride. Pride and delusion come from *tamas*.' It is said in the *Gītā*, 'Desire and anger are born of *rajoguna*...' ¹ Without differentiating between *tamas* and *rajas* the Master discussed it from a wider perspective, saying, 'both these qualities bind a man while *sattva* sets one free.' 'Through anger one loses one's wits and cannot distinguish between right and wrong. In a fit of anger Hanumān set fire to Lankā, without thinking for a moment that the fire might also burn down the hut where Sītā lived.' We clearly understand how we lose control of our senses when we become angry; for we say: 'I was not in my senses then. I was angry.' The Lord has said in the *Gītā*: 'Thinking of sense objects, attachment to them is formed in a man. From attachment longing, and from longing anger grows. From anger comes delusion, and from delusion loss of memory. From loss of memory comes the ruin of discrimination, and from the ruin of discrimination he perishes.' ²

These things come in succession. First, a connection is established with sense objects. Then, dwelling in the midst of,

and interacting with sense objects, one slowly starts loving them and also develops a hankering for them. Thereafter one develops anger at anything which stands in the way of obtaining the desired objects; thus, desire breeds anger. Anger then generates delusion or loss of discrimination. Loss of memory follows delusion, and the awareness of the Self, or the memory of one's goal, is lost. Loss of memory, or loss of one's commitment to the goal, brings about loss of understanding. Here understanding means one's resolution. The positive resolution to follow one particular path and be firm about one's goal, gets lost. When one's understanding and power of discrimination is lost then what remains of a person? He is verily ruined.

The point worth noting here is that the Master did not consider desire and anger to be separate. The same thing that we experience in one form as desire takes another shape and is transformed into anger. Now the question that naturally arises is: how do we conquer the passions like desire, anger, etc. that beset the human mind? The Master said: 'Girindra Ghosh of Pathuriāghātā once remarked, "Since you cannot get rid of your passions—your lust, your anger, and so on—give them a new direction. Instead of desiring worldly pleasures, desire God. Have intercourse with Brahman. If you cannot get rid of anger then change its direction...." If you cannot get rid of temptation, direct it towards God. Be infatuated with God's beauty.' The other passions like pride and envy arise out of these. Be infatuated with God. Be proud of Him. The baneful influences of the six passions go away when these are turned Godward. In the household life in particular, if our intense attraction for someone is turned towards God, that attraction will take us to Him. Of course it is not as easy as it appears to be. But this is one of the methods of spiritual practice. The Master has time and again laid stress on this method in many contexts because it is indeed very practical for ordinary people.

Very often we feel specially attracted to someone. The extreme example of this perhaps, is, King Bharata's infatuation

for a fawn. But we also bind ourselves by fixing our entire mind on someone for whom we feel a deep attraction. What is the remedy? According to the Master one should try to see God in that person. On one occasion the Master asked a widow how she was faring in her spiritual practice. She replied; 'Someone's face or words crowd the mind while I try to meditate.' Not content with such a superficial reply, he asked; 'Whom do you think of?' She replied that she had brought up a nephew of hers. Her only attachment was for that boy and it was thoughts of him that came to her. The Master advised her: 'Think of that boy as Gopāla [the child Krishna]. You've been loving the boy as a human being. From now on consider him as Gopāla.' The Master did not advise her to take her mind away from the boy and try to turn it Godward, nor did he tell her to develop dispassion and practise spiritual discipline. Following the Master's advice, in a short time that woman devotee attained such deep spiritual realizations that she even used to experience bhāva samādhi. This is the path. It would have been impossible for her had she been advised, 'Don't think of that boy.' If we try to change the tendencies of our mind from their natural course by forcibly pulling the reins, they will try to overcome us, harnessing their full strength. It is like a swiftly flowing river trying to smash down the dam that is built to change its course. If, however, its course is changed gradually by digging canals, the river will follow the new course. In the same way, if one is attracted to any worldly object or person, then by continually meditating on God's presence in that object or person, one's mind will be slowly purified because of the quality of the object of meditation. Then the focus of attraction will become God instead of the particular object or person. This is the secret.

It is said in the *Gītā* that actions, which by their very nature bind us, actually set us free from bondage when performed in the right way. In the same way, the love that binds us can also make us free when properly applied. Here the Master was teaching the technique. This does not call for

waging a heavy fight with our mind. Such a fight would have unnecessarily wasted our energy while the mind would have remained unconquered. However, by applying this technique, after some time the woman's mind could easily forget the human element in the boy and visualize the presence of Gopāla.

An aspirant's mind does not become an insentient object, like a log or a boulder, when it is purified, nor do the natural tendencies of his mind die. The tendencies turn Godward. The Master taught us to think of God in the object of our attraction and consciously apply this technique. The scriptures say that insentient objects do not attract our mind. It is the consciousness that is immanent in them, the essence of God within, His blissful presence, that draws our mind. We bind ourselves because we fail to understand that the source of attraction is God and not the insentient veil covering Him. If God's presence is seen in the object of attraction, it ceases to be a cause of bondage. We can understand from this why the Master's mind would be filled with divine bliss at the sight of certain things which would have filled the minds of ordinary people with depraved thoughts. Can the drunkenness of a drunkard arouse spiritual thoughts in the mind of a person? Whether it was due to drinking or something else, if the experience was one of joy, that feeling would awaken divine bliss in the Master's mind and he would pass into samādhi.

In many other such cases where ordinary people are drawn by intense sense pleasures, the Master did not perceive any sense object, but only Him. Sense pleasure is but a small fraction of divine bliss. For example, if a lamp is covered by a shade, at least some of its rays are diffused through the shade. In the same way, we feel drawn by a minute fraction of the bliss of Brahman that emerges from underneath the cover of sense objects. That is why the Master reiterated time and again: 'Withdraw your attachment for sense objects and direct it towards God.' This is what he called 'changing the direction.'

In this way if we keep trying to realize the true essence of the sense objects by changing the direction of the passions, sense objects disappear and the Supreme Lord manifests Himself. Then He alone attracts us. This is one of the important ways of *sādhana*; and is one of the methods used in the path of *bhakti*.

This is how it is done: We have an image of clay, stone, or wood and begin to think that it is the supreme Lord—that it is His image, and in it we shall contemplate on Him. The image is directly before us, and we can dress it, serve it, and worship it. We are not able to contemplate on the real nature of God. However, if we think rationally we understand that the image is not God. It is the creation of a sculptor or an artist. But the scriptures advise us: See God in that image. We dress the image, serve it, and we shower our love on it; and gradually He becomes manifest in it. This is what is called turning the direction. We say that the deity is awakened through our *sādhana*. Does that mean that the deity was sleeping? Do we have to push it to awaken it? No, it is not like that. So far as we are concerned the deity is asleep. But in reality, we ourselves are not awakened; we are not conscious that He is there. We go on thinking: 'He is there, He is there, He is there.' Imagining thus, our love is first directed towards the gross form. Thereafter, while contemplating on the clay form (*mrinmayarupa*) the conscious form (*chinmayarupa*) emerges. This is the consummation of *sādhana*. The rules of worship enjoin that during the worship life is invoked and instilled in the image. Where from does this life emerge? It comes from us. We imagine that the deity emerges from our heart and becomes manifest in the image.

Worship through Symbols

The idea here is that God is in our heart. However, we are unable to worship Him there because the mind cannot be collected there. All of us who have tried this come to realize how difficult it is to meditate on Him in our heart. So we need

a support on which the mind can be concentrated. The image provides that external support. It is not the object of worship. It is the symbol of the object of external worship. When we worship the symbol, our mind gradually tries to reach the conscious Principle aided by that gross object. As we go on trying, the Divine essence will manifest in that symbol. The goal is to experience that manifestation. This is why the Master asked that woman devotee to superimpose the form of Gopāla on her nephew and shower her love on him. The Master once said: 'If God can be worshipped in a clay image, then why not through a man?' One can worship God in a human being. This is why the worship of a maiden (kumārī pujā) is performed during the worship of Goddess Durgā. We imagine the divine manifestation of Daśabhujā (another name of Goddess Durgā) in a girl who has physical limitations, who does not have ten arms nor a lion to ride on, and we worship her. This is because as long as the mind is gross it needs a gross support, a kind of resting place. The gross mind seizes a gross object which it can grasp and understand and with the help of which it can gradually attain the power of concentration.

An image is not the only symbol of God. A sound can also be one. When we worship 'Om' as His symbol, the sound itself is not Brahman, but we imagine it to be the essence of Brahman. In the same way, when we meditate on God using a mental image of Him, this is also a symbol. If it were the Lord Himself, we would not have to make strenuous efforts to concentrate on Him. Thus, there can be many images and symbols by taking the help of which we think of Him. We do not think of the symbols separately. Even a mind attached to sense objects slowly becomes calm and acquires devotion if it is concentrated on a particular symbol. In the *Bhāgavata*, therefore, image worship is said to be the primary stage. There, devotees are classified into three categories, and of them the image worshipper is said to be the ordinary devotee (prākṛita bhakta).

It is imperative for most people to take the help of a symbol in order to attain devotion. In his lectures in the West Swamiji said: 'You ridicule us because we worship an image and say that we worship God. Indeed, what other idea arises in your mind by uttering the word "God"? The word itself is a symbol with the help of which you worship God, and without the help of that symbol you cannot think of the Principle that is God. You think sometimes of the word "God", sometimes of the image in the Church, or at other times of the symbol of the Holy Cross. Everything is but a symbol, which is a gross means of concentrating the mind. Where then lies the difference in your method of worship?' Until the mind becomes pure, none can think of God without the help of symbols.

There is a poem in *Bhaktiyoga* of Ashvini Dutta:

O friend, if you are able to sail past
this ocean of the world,
By worshipping a husking pedal,
Who cares what people say?
Go your way and you will enjoy
the bliss of devotion.

If we are able to cross the ocean of saṃsāra and attain the object we are seeking by worshipping even a husking pedal, then what does it matter if people say it is idolatry or something silly? The Master's teaching is: Let each one choose the way that suits him to turn the mind Godward.

Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar (the homeopathic physician who treated Sri Ramakrishna) favoured devotion combined with knowledge; he did not quite understand ecstatic love. That is why he said; 'Can one realize God without first controlling the passions?' The Master admitted Dr. Sarkar's views. He didn't say it was wrong. He said: 'What you say is according to the path of discrimination. It is known as jñāna yoga.' An aspirant must first conquer the passions by waging a war against them, and then offer that conquered mind to God. The

idea is reasonable but it is not easy to do this because here, the purification of the mind precedes the effort to realize God.

Devotion—A Simple and Natural Path

The Master said: 'But God can also be realized through the path of devotion. Once the devotee develops love for the Lotus Feet of God and enjoys the singing of His name and glories, he does not have to make a special effort to restrain his senses.' This love for God, which is the path of devotion, is not a path demanding great struggle. In the *Bhāgavata* we find that the Lord was regarded as their beloved by the gopīs, as her child by mother Yaśodā, and as their companion by the cowherds of Vraja. All these are paths of love and devotion. When such love develops in us then we do not have to fight with the passions to be able to offer the mind to God.

The Master has said time and again that the path of devotion is easy and natural. Love is a natural emotion, and here we only have to chose a suitable object to which we should direct this love. If God is accepted as the object of love, or if we develop the proclivity to accept Him, then we don't have to make any special effort to fix our mind on Him. Our mind gets concentrated on Him on its own. It is like the mind of a mother who loves her child. It naturally centres around her child, specially when it is a baby. Is it because the mother is a yogī or of the meditative type? No, not at all. Since the child is the object of her love, her mind is naturally drawn towards it. She does not have to make any effort to develop the habit of concentration. This indeed is the natural and easy way. For a devotee following this path there is no need to struggle to bring the sense organs under control. So Sri Ramakrishna said, 'God can also be realized through the path of devotion.' And he added, by way of example: 'Suppose a man has just lost his son and is mourning his death. Can he be in a mood to quarrel with others that very day, or enjoy a feast in the house of a friend? Can he, that very day, show his pride before others or

enjoy sense pleasures?' He gave another example: 'If the moth discovers light, can it remain in darkness any longer?' Regardless of the consequences it flies towards the light.

Thinking about 'the consequences' Dr. Sarkar said: 'It would rather fly into the flame and perish.' His idea is that if love is directed to an improper object it may be harmful. But the Master immediately replied: 'Oh no, that's not so. A lover of God does not burn himself to death, like a moth.' Why does it not happen? It is because of the quality of the object. Here, thinking about the object of love does not bring any evil. Whether the devotee has a clear idea of God or not, his love alone will take him to the Divine, and God will reveal Himself before him even though he may not try for it. The gopīs realized God following this path and not by practising any spiritual discipline. Since they loved Him, His essence became manifest to them. In the *Bhāgavata*, the gopīs sing, 'O Lord, You are not the delightful Sri Krishna of the gopīs alone. As the inmost Being of everything, as the eternal Seer, You see everything.'³ The significance of this statement is: 'Do You not realize how miserable we are due to your absence?' But how do they express this? They say that as the inmost Being in everybody's heart the Lord sees everything, so He can also realize their pain. How could the gopīs realize God the way they did? By practising spiritual discipline? Oh, no. By studying the scriptures? The gopīs never studied any scripture. Then, perhaps, by performing rituals and sacrifices? No, they did not do anything of that sort. Their only means was their limitless, unconditional love for Him. They had nothing else. God too could not but reveal Himself before them as they were rich in the wealth of limitless love. The true nature of God cannot remain hidden from one who loves Him deeply. Thus, the knowledge of the gopīs is not comparable to that of the jñānīs or yogīs. They realized Him by a love that came from the depths of their heart, and the only method they followed was love. To know His nature by concentrating the mind on Him through the path of discrimination and self-discipline is jñāna

yoga. This was not the path of the gopīs. That is why they asked Uddhava: 'Are we yogīs or jñānīs that we can concentrate our minds and meditate on Him? Besides, the mind with which one meditates has long ago been offered at the feet of Sri Krishna.'

Often the question arises in the mind how we can love the object of love—that is, God—without knowing Him? The Master also said: 'How can you love someone unless you know him?' It is true. But it is also true that He who is not knowable even by sādhanā in many births, cannot be loved at all if that love depends on our knowing Him. Therefore the Master advises us to superimpose that love. Everybody feels love in his heart. Maybe one person loves his dear ones. Another loves riches and wealth. Someone else loves honour and position. If this natural tendency of love which is always directed towards sense objects is redirected Godward, then the love which otherwise binds us becomes the cause of our liberation by virtue of the nature of the object of our love. No impurities can then remain. When the gopīs desired God they did not seek Him with His divine splendour; rather, they craved Him as their paramour, their beloved—a relationship which is despised in society. But then how did they attain liberation? This question has been raised in the *Bhāgavata*.

Here lies the 'godliness' of God! If the mind is directed Godward, in whatever manner it may be, the mind will become pure by virtue of the very nature of the object. Thus Sri Ramakrishna says; 'By any means turn your mind Godward and concentrate on Him.' This is the method of bhakti yoga. But this love is not ordinary love. It is not shopkeeping. A shopkeeper says that such-and-such is worth so much. But that love indeed is true love where there is no such give and take.

The gopīs had asked Sri Krishna this. Once the gopīs were frantically searching for the Lord in the groves and bowers of the forest. After an exhausting search He finally appeared before them. The pride of the gopīs was hurt. No doubt God had appeared, but why did He give them such pain before

appearing? They asked Him: 'There are different kinds of relationships in human society. Some show love in return for being loved. Some love even without getting anything, without expecting to be loved in return. Again there are instances where in spite of being loved one does not love in return. And there are cases where one loves no matter if one gets anything or not.' The Lord understood what they meant. He said that His love did not belong to any of those categories. He explained: 'Where one loves after being loved, there you will not find love at all; that is only shopkeeping. And one who does not love even after getting love is ungrateful. Those who love irrespective of being loved in return, are either realized souls, or they are satisfied in the Self (Ātmārāma). I am not a shopkeeper, nor am I ungrateful, nor am I a yogī.' The gopīs then asked: 'Then why have you made us suffer so much?' God replied: 'I disappeared in order to intensify your longing.'

The Path of Knowledge

Sri Ramakrishna did not reject the path of knowledge, jñāna yoga. 'But this is an extremely difficult path,' he said. 'Suppose I see my hand cut by a thorn and blood gushing out; then it is not proper for me to say: "Why, my hand is not cut by the thorn. I am all right." One cannot say this until the thorn is burnt by the fire of knowledge. This path is difficult because what the human mind understands through the intellect is not necessarily accepted by the heart. Besides, the understanding of the intellect is insignificant compared to the strength of our emotions—this we know for certain. The scriptures say that we should become free from all desires before we try to become jñānayogīs.

The Master said that it is possible for an ordinary person to attain God through the path of devotion. But without intense detachment the path of discrimination is of no avail. That is why the Master used to regard scholars who had no renunciation and discrimination as insignificant as straw. The

learning that produces 'loud speech consisting of a shower of words,' or merely some information, will not touch the heart. The information collected thus is not assimilated in our life and fails to influence it. Within no time this so-called learning fades away. The mind is again deluded and reverts to its earlier state, and it will again be drawn towards sense objects. Such learning is useless and fails to do any good.

Scholarship and Spiritual Life

Mahimacharan once said to Sri Ramakrishna: 'There is so much to read. The scriptures are endless.' Hearing this the Master said that if the study of scriptures could make one knowledgeable then supreme realization would be very easy. 'Hearing is better than reading, and seeing is better than hearing.' Books are mere books—they have no life in them. If we hear teachings from someone whose personality casts its influence on us, then such hearing becomes more effective than reading. However, knowledge derived from reading or hearing is indirect knowledge. So it is said that seeing is better than hearing. That is to say, the Truth has to be realized. 'The Self, my dear, should be verily realized: should be heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon.'⁴ One should know the Self. Hearing, reflecting, and meditating are therefore necessary. These three are the means to the realization of the Self. The goal is direct realization, not simply getting an idea of the Self by reading or hearing. The influence of such realization is so penetrating that it instantly obliterates the inimical tendencies left in the mind from scores of births. Knowledge derived from the study of scriptures does not clear our doubt and disbelief; as it seems to contradict our direct perception. We may hear such statements as 'I am Brahman' or 'The world is illusory' many times, but we fail to comprehend the Truth. This knowledge derived from words fails to remove our ignorance forthwith. So it is said that first one has to hear and then reason. Then, in order to fix the conclusion firmly in the mind, it is necessary to steady the

mind through meditation. Thus through repeated practice, as enjoined in jñāna yoga, one has to attain supreme realization. So there is a vast difference between hearing the words of the scriptures and direct realization.

If the pattern of our life does not change in spite of hearing the words of the scriptures or of great souls, then such hearing is useless. In this context we may keep in mind the Master's story of a boatman and a pundit. After boarding a boat, a pundit starts asking the naive boatman about his knowledge of the Vedas and Vedānta. After each question the boatman says that he doesn't know about it as he has never read anything. The pundit then says, 'You fool, seventy-five percent of your life is wasted.' Soon a storm rises. The boatman asks; 'O revered sir, do you know how to swim?' Now it is the turn of the pundit to say no. The boatman says, 'Now, sir, it appears that a hundred percent of your life is wasted.'

In the same way, we know some scriptures but do not know their true significance. Thus a hundred percent of our life is being wasted. The Master said: 'What is the use in simply repeating the words of the scriptures? One has to know their essence and realize that in one's life.' He used to say that 'the trick by which one can sail across this ocean of worldliness is the real trick.' Otherwise, what use is our knowledge if it does not enable us to do that? The scriptures say: 'Know that Self alone that is one without a second, and give up all other talks. This is the bridge leading to immortality.'⁵

In the Nārada-Santakumāra dialogue in the *Chāndogya Upanishad*, we find that Nārada gives a list of the subjects which he knows:

O venerable sir, I have read the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, and Atharva Veda the fourth. History and mythology which are the fifth Veda, grammar, the rites for the manes, mathematics, the subject of natural disturbances, mineralogy, logic, ethics, etymology, the subject of ancillary knowledge concerning the Vedas, the

science of the elements, the science of archery, astronomy, the science of serpents, the subject of fine arts—I know all these, O venerable sir.⁶

From this list we understand that he was adept in all the subjects common in those days. Notwithstanding all this, he says he is not a knower of the Self as he knows the subjects only textually. It is heard that a knower of the Self goes beyond sorrow. Being ignorant of the Self he was full of sorrow. He therefore prays; 'O venerable sir, please take me beyond sorrow.'⁷

Even after acquiring knowledge of all secular disciplines, without realizing the Self one cannot go beyond sorrow and attain immortality. In the present context the Master says that of the paths for attaining Self-knowledge, the path of reasoning (jnāna yoga) is an extremely difficult one. It demands much preparation. Our mind should be so prepared that it should wholeheartedly accept the truth that is arrived at through the process of inquiry and reasoning. Normally, our mind tends to go in the opposite direction of what we decide by reasoning. Thus, reasoning becomes useless.

Sri Ramakrishna further said: 'Those actually engaged in a game of chess cannot always decide the moves on the board correctly. The onlookers often judge the moves better than the players.' A little analysis makes it clear of how we 'misjudge the moves.' The truth is clearly perceived, but cannot be interpreted in our lives in any way. Worldly people praise truth and quote from the scriptures: 'There should be no inadvertence about truth.'¹¹ But at the crucial moment our strength to hold on to truth fails. We tell lies indiscriminately, drawn by our attachment for sense objects and with a view to attaining wealth, happiness, and fame. Therefore, unless we can give up attachment for sense objects it is difficult to remain firm in the path of truth and morality. Our intellect gets deluded due to such attachment. Worldly people are those who are attached to sense objects. Samsāra means that which is

fleeting, perishable. And anyone attached to the perishable is a *samsārī*. Whatever they may say, they are very much drawn towards sense objects, though they may pretend to be great scholars and regard themselves as all-knowing. The Master clearly shows that though such people are playing, they fail to realize how they misjudge their moves. Misjudging their moves they stray from the goal, and thus lose the great opportunity of attaining supreme bliss. Kālidāsa says: 'You lose much for the sake of a little. Therefore you are deluded in your judgement.' Even in such a state of delusion people regard themselves as intelligent.

Coming back to where we began, Dr. Sarkar took a philosophical view of the subject and said: 'If he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] had studied books he could not have acquired so much knowledge.' The Master added: 'There was a time when I lay on the ground in the Panchavati and prayed to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, reveal to me what the *karmīs* have realized through their ritualistic worship, what the *yogīs* have realized through yoga, and what the *jñānīs* have realized through discrimination.'" The allusion to the 'Mother's revealing' does not mean attainment of intellectual knowledge. It refers to the manifestation of Reality to the pure mind. The Master's prayer to the Mother is to realize the Truth through a pure mind. Sri Ramakrishna's Mother is She whose effulgence illumines the entire world. Her other name is Pure intelligence. 'Salutations to the Divine Goddess who resides in all beings as Intelligence,'" says the Chandi.

Delusion

The scriptures say that the natural tendency of the intellect is to reveal the Reality. But the intellect, which can be compared to a lamp, remains covered by the dusty veil of attachment and aversion like a tin shade over a lamp. Hence it is unable to reveal anything at all. Thus we are deluded into seeing truth as falsehood and falsehood as truth, the absolute as

the relative and the relative as the absolute, existence as non-existence and non-existence as existence. This ignorance or the principle of nescience, or taking one thing for another, is called *mohanidrā* (the sleep of delusion). Indeed, our entire life is an uninterrupted spell of slumber. It is said in the *Chandī*: 'Salutations to the Divine Goddess who resides in all beings as sleep.'¹⁰ This is the Divine Mother's illusory spell. The Mother has lulled us to sleep. It is like a mother lulling her child to sleep so that she can attend to her household work. Otherwise, the Divine Mother's sport cannot continue. If everybody wakes up then the Divine Mother's play will come to an end. As long as She does not free us from the spell of delusion we shall not be able to understand Her sport. That is why the sage advises King Suratha in the *Chandī*: 'Oh great King, take refuge in Her, the supreme Īśvarī. When She is worshipped She bestows upon men enjoyment, heaven, and liberation.'¹¹ Thereafter Sri Ramakrishna said: 'I have not read books. But people show me respect because I chant the name of the Divine Mother. Shambhu Mullick said about me, "Here is a great hero without a sword or shield."' The Master did not have any of the qualities like learning, intelligence, or scholarship which would make a person great from the worldly point of view. He had only one weapon—the deep sense of dependence that a small child has on his mother. Because of this dependence, the Divine Mother revealed to Sri Ramakrishna that which a yogī attains by practising yoga, a jñānī attains by practising discrimination, and all that the Vedas and Vedānta contain. He did not have to do anything for himself. From within, the Mother guided him in the right direction. The Divine Mother's limitless bounty of power, the power that fosters well-being, flowed freely through him. As the Mother is present everywhere, within and without, why should one who has Her within easy access worry? If a person gets everything he wants by simply asking the Mother, why should he need any other weapon? We lose battles even though the Mother resides in us because we cannot realize Her presence due to the veil of ignorance.

REFERENCES

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— *Gītā*, 3.37
2. *Dhyāyato vishayān pumsah sangasteshupajāyate,
Sangāt sanjāyate kāmah kāmāt krodho'bhijāyate.
Krodhādbhavati sammohah sammohāt smritivibhramah,
Smritibhramśād buddhināśo buddhināśāt pranaśyati.*
— *Gītā*, 2.62-63
3. *Na khalu gopikānandano bhavānakhiladehināmantarātmadrik.*
— *Bhāgavata*, 10.31.4
4. *Ātmā vā are drashtavyah śrotavyo mantavyo
nididhyāsītavyah...*
— *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 2.4.5
5. *Tamevaikam jānatha ātmānamanyā
vācho vimunchathāmritasyaisha setuh.*
— *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.5
6. *Rigvedam bhagavo'dhyemi Yajurvedam Sāmavedam-
ātharvanam chaturthamiti hāsapurānam panchamam vedānām
vedam pitryam rāśim daivam nidhim vākovākya mekāyanam
devavidyām Brahavidyām bhutavidyām kshattravidyām
nakshatravidyām sarpadevajana vidyāmetad bhagavo'dhyemi.*
— *Chāndogya Upanishad*, 7.1.2
7. *...tam mā bhagavān śokasya pāram tārayatu.*
— *Chāndogya Upanishad*, 7.1.3.
8. *Satyānna pramaditavyam.*
— *Taittirīya Upanishad*, 1.11.1

9. *Yā devī sarvabhuteshu buddhirupena samsthitā,
Namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah.*

— *Chandī*, 5.20

10. *Yā devī sarvabhuteshu nidrā rupena samsthitā,
Namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah.*

— *Chandī*, 5.23

11. *Tāmupaihi mahārāja śaranam parameśwarīm,
Ārādhitā saiva nrinām bhogasvargāpavargadā.*

— *Chandī*, 13.5

CHAPTER 53

The Gospel (October 22, 1885)

God and the Avatāra

Sri Ramakrishna wanted to remove the deficiencies in the character of Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar and so, he asked Ishan to argue with the doctor. No doubt the doctor was very simple and intelligent and had a noble heart, but he would not believe anything that was beyond his understanding. Dr. Sarkar was considered one of the best physicians of that time. Patients used to call on him from different places. For each patient he would check in his books, compare the symptoms, and then prescribe medicines. Thus he would take considerable time attending to each patient. But ever since he met Sri Ramakrishna the doctor's mind was constantly on him. One day he said to M.: 'Well, my practice and patients! I shall lose everything on account of your paramahansa.' The doctor whom the patients could hardly get even for an hour or so, spent five to six hours a day with Sri Ramakrishna; such was his attraction for the Master. But he was not the type of person who would accept everything the Master said without reasoning, or surrender to him. But the Master was equally importunate and wouldn't let him off. Whenever he found flaws in the doctor's character he wanted to remove them. The doctor did not believe that God could incarnate himself in human form. So even though he maintained a loving relationship with the Master's devotees, he did not hesitate to argue with them regarding this, saying: 'Whatever you may

do, please do not worship him as God. You are turning the head of this good man.' Many times the Master made fun of such comments. Whatever might have happened on that day, he asked Ishan to argue with the doctor. He wanted to drive home the point that it was not foolishness to believe in the concept of an Incarnation. Ishan was initially reluctant. Then the Master became annoyed and said: 'Why? Won't you say the right thing?' Earlier, whenever his admirers tried to project him as an Avatāra, he would become greatly annoyed, saying: 'So many big pundits and scholars recognized this [meaning himself] as an Avatāra. What do these doctors and actors have to say? I feel disgusted when I hear the word Avatāra.' Someone who used to say this often couldn't have advised Ishan to talk about Avatāras in order to project himself as one. His purpose was to remove the doubts of the doctor, whom he loved and who also loved him, and to smooth out his angularities. Therefore he said, in continuation of Ishan's statement, that it was beyond a person's ability to realize the nature of God. It is said in the *Gītā*: 'Not knowing My supreme nature as the Lord of all beings, foolish people disregard Me who have taken a human body.'¹ Failing to realize His true essence foolish people disregard Him, thinking he is a human being. Well, is it ever possible for a person to understand Him? He who has created billions of worlds such as ours, under whose command every particle in the universe moves—can a human being as insignificant as a speck of dust be able to understand Him fully? We may admit that God is the creator, protector, and destroyer of this world, but it is impossible for us to conceive of God being in a human form and behaving like a human being. Assuming a human form God goes through various experiences, like happiness and sorrow, endures ailments and bereavements, and feels anxious to be united with near and dear ones and even weeps in their absence—such sport has been observed in all the Incarnations. For ordinary mortals it is very difficult to accede to this type of indulgence on the part of God. How can someone imagine that

the very person whom he sees directly before him is the omniscient, omnipotent God? Devakī, being wonder-struck, expressed the same feeling: '...It is nothing but a miracle!' How can we conceive of the infinite One confining Itself to a frail human form? That is why the Master said: 'Can a one-seer pot hold four seers of milk?' It will never be possible for a person to set a limit to what God can or cannot become, because He is self-willed and omnipresent, whereas a jīva is but a most insignificant being.

In this regard there is a story told by Sri Ramakrishna: Once Nārada was returning from Vaikuntha, and a passer-by asked him: 'Revered sir, have you been to Vaikuntha? What was the Lord doing?' Nārada said: 'He was passing an elephant through the eye of a needle.' Hearing such an absurd statement the person burst into laughter. He could not believe that Nārada had really been to Vaikuntha. Another person heard Nārada's statement and said: 'It's quite possible. Nothing is impossible for the Lord.' It is necessary to take to heart the statement 'nothing is impossible for the Lord'. That is why the Master said time and again: 'Never try to set any limit to Him. God has form and He is formless too. Further He is beyond both form and formlessness.' And we can never know His infinite possibilities.

Then how do we know Him?

The Master replied: 'Therefore one should trust in the words of holy men and great souls, those who have realized God. They constantly think of God, as a lawyer of his lawsuits.' If anybody can speak about God it is the saints because their body, mind, and spirit are dedicated to God. As they always contemplate on God, they are capable of speaking about the Divine. And one should therefore trust them.

Sri Ramakrishna said many times that it was not possible to set a limit to God. He also said this through the story of the 'Chameleon changing its colours.' While trying to explain the nature of Brahman the Upanishads have attributed so many mutually opposite qualities to Him that, far from facilitating

the understanding of the nature of Brahman, they have added to the confusion. That is why a sage once asked, 'Why not describe Brahman like we say, 'this is a horse', or 'this a cow?' But Brahman cannot be understood that way because He is not an object of ordinary vision. As it is not possible to make a blind person understand what colour is, so also, as long as we do not realize God, it will not be possible for us to understand His true nature, try as we may.

The Purification of the Mind and God-realization

In order to realize God it is necessary to have a pure intellect. Those who do not have a pure intellect say that God is a concept that has been invented to delude people. They say, 'How can we admit anything which cannot be proved by science?' Of course, it is not true that all scientists say so. In modern days many scientists have started to think about the existence of God. Again, many of them have set aside the subject as being beyond their jurisdiction.

Even the scriptures say about God: 'That which is not comprehended by the mind.' Again, elsewhere it is said: 'He is to be attained through the mind alone.' This contradiction is resolved thus: In the first instance, the reference is to the impure mind; in the second, it speaks of the mind that is pure, composed, devoid of attachment and aversion, and free from all desires. Indeed, what else is there other than the mind through which we can know Him? When the mind becomes pure then 'Consciousness is experienced by man's inmost consciousness'. This is the state when the object known and the means of knowing it become one.

That which is the pure intellect is the pure Ātman. All distinctions fall off when the pure intellect unites with the pure Ātman. This unification is called realization. But this realization does not come about by performing rituals or by reasoning. Only if the mind is purified and free from all dualities is it capable of realizing God. When the mind is

purified all troubles and suffering come to an end. This is thus explained by the Master: A room that has been dark for a thousand years is instantly illumined by lighting a single matchstick.

But the difficulty is in lighting the matchstick. One goes on rubbing, but still the stick does not light. There are, of course, ways of lighting the matchstick, but we do not have the patience, forbearance, and willingness to suffer. But we should try anyhow. The scientist says that he is able to explain to any person the truths he has tested and verified. But if a novice who has no knowledge of science is sent to a laboratory, he will not understand anything. In the same way, for practising spiritual disciplines too there is need of mental preparation. Everybody has the right to know the truth; but the effort one has to make for acquiring this knowledge is more than what is required in all other disciplines. Prior preparation is necessary for the attainment of any kind of knowledge. But the preparation for attaining the most difficult knowledge—knowledge of the Self—is, of course, the severest. Without making any such effort we pass judgement, saying: 'Since everyone cannot know God, how can we admit His existence?' This is not the right attitude. It is true that everybody is entitled to know, but the attainment of any knowledge, be it secular or spiritual, is subject to rigorous disciplines.

The Master's Method of Teaching

Next, the Master told Dr. Sarkar: 'A sannyāsī should renounce "woman and gold."' Since the people to whom he was talking were not sannyāsīs, but householders for whom complete renunciation was not possible, he became cautious and said: 'But this renunciation is not meant for householders like you. It is meant only for sannyāsīs. You may live among women as far as possible in a spirit of detachment.' He did not stop by merely telling them to live in a spirit of detachment, he also taught them how to cultivate detachment. 'Now and then

you must retire into solitude and think of God. Women must not be allowed there.' True, he advised men to maintain a distance from women, but it did not mean that women were to be despised. He always reminded men that of all the attitudes towards women the best was the filial attitude. The Mother-child relationship is as sweet as it is pure. So he laid emphasis on that relationship. 'Salutations to the divine Goddess who resides in all beings in the form of Mother.' Therefore, the question of contempt does not arise. It is not possible to avoid somebody by harbouring a feeling of contempt. The idea appears in a song of Mukunda Das :

He whom you hate and keep aloof,
Will drag you down, and hold you back,
While occupying your whole heart.

If somebody hates another, the object of his hatred will totally lay hold of his heart. Therefore, instead of hatred, if one is able to fill his heart with a pure attitude, one does not have anything to fear.

Whenever Sri Ramakrishna taught anything he also taught the method of applying it successfully. The Master might have given special advice in certain cases, but whenever he gave advice before a general audience he observed extreme caution. A very exalted and difficult ideal should not be set before ordinary people, because failure to live up to it may give rise to depression and generate an inferiority complex in their minds.

In the *Gītā* the Lord has said that both paths—jñāna yoga and karma yoga—are good, but karma yoga is better, for everybody can follow it. Jñāna yoga is suitable only for those who have been able to purify their mind to a certain extent through karma yoga and have made some progress. Without such mental preparation, pursuing jñāna yoga may become counterproductive. So the Master said elsewhere: 'When a man does all sorts of worldly things, he should not say "I am Brahman".' Only he who has attained control over his natural

tendencies, and has virtually effaced his egoism, can say 'I am Brahman.' For such an aspirant this is an apt discipline. However, he who is yet to free himself from the bondage of his sense organs but says, 'I am Brahman', may fall from the ideal.

It is therefore not good enough to set a very exalted ideal; before setting it, one must see whether the student is qualified for the ideal or not. 'Only those who are qualified shall succeed following that discipline.'² It would be disastrous for an unqualified person to follow such an exalted path. It has been stated in the *Bhāgavata*: Listen to the Lord's words, remember His divine sport, but never try to do what He does. Only one who has become established in the divine nature can imitate God's actions and not others. Sometimes, while trying to follow spiritual instructions, complications crop up because we do not assess the qualifications of the aspirants. Even though the meaning of different scriptural teachings appear to be the same, their forms will differ for aspirants of varying eligibilities.

There is a classic example in this regard. Once Indra, on behalf of the gods, and Virochana, on behalf of the demons, approached Brahmā and prayed for his advice. A noble teacher is never partial when he gives advice. So Brahmā gave them the same advice. Because of their different mental tendencies, Indra understood the meaning of the advice one way while Virochana understood it in another way. Their question was: 'What is the Ātman?' The reason why they asked the question was this: At that time a battle was going on between the gods and the demons, and for achieving victory it was necessary to attain immortality. They had heard that by knowing the Ātman they could become immortal. Therefore they solicited Brahmā's advice as to how they could acquire Self-knowledge. After making them live the life of a celibate for thirty-two years Brahmā asked them to bring a saucerful of water. When water was brought, he asked them: 'What do you see in it? Whatever you see is the Ātman.' Both of them saw their own reflection in the water. What did Virochana understand? His

understanding was simple enough: 'The body is verily the Ātman because it is what I see by way of the reflection. Keep the body fit, free from disease, and powerful, and victory is inevitable.' He returned satisfied. Indra too thought as much and left. On his way, however, he thought: 'The body without any ornaments looks one way, but properly adorned with ornaments the same body will appear different. Then, does the Ātman change with different forms of the body?' The thought also arose in his mind: 'The Ātman is absolute, so It must have an eternal form. If the form changes then how can It be deemed to be absolute and eternal? Therefore, by simply knowing this impermanent and unreal body we can never attain immortality.' He returned and placed his doubts before Brahmā. Hearing the question, Brahmā was pleased and advised Indra to lead a celibate life for another thirty-two years. In this way, teaching and leading a celibate life alternated for a hundred and one years. Finally, Indra realized the nature of the Ātman.

The fact that the meaning of the same teaching differs with regard to the capability of the recipients needs to be specially kept in mind. It is imperative to assess the aptitude of the recipients at the time of giving advice. We find in the *Gospel* that the Master said time and again: 'Not I, but Thou. It is not good to say "I am He."' No doubt 'I am He' is a scriptural teaching, but the Master, keeping in mind the qualifications of ordinary people, said that it was not the proper attitude. To what extent the idea 'I am He' is capable of creating disturbances can be seen by taking a look at learned fools. The study of the scriptures does not necessarily make one understand their significance. This is illustrated in the wonderful story of the king and the *Bhāgavata* pundit narrated by the Master. While analysing and trying to understand the meaning of the king's remark, 'You had better understand it yourself first,' the pundit came to realize the essence of the *Bhāgavata*: 'God alone is real and everything else is illusory.' Understanding the true significance of the scripture, the

pundit did not go back to the king any more since he was no longer in need of money. Since he had understood the import, everything was surrendered to God. As he left home he asked a man to take this message to the king: 'O King, I now understand.' He then renounced the world, totally surrendering himself at the feet of God. This is called real understanding.

Study and Realization

The essence of the scriptures cannot be understood without a pure intellect. 'The wisdom of the Self is not to be attained through argumentation.'³ Argument does not lead to the understanding of the real significance of the scriptures or the realization of Truth. 'Neither does one attain it by performing rituals, sacrifices, or meditation,'⁴ says the Lord in the *Gītā*. It is also said in the Upanishad: '[He] should not think of too many words, for it is exhausting to the organ of speech.'⁵ Simply studying many scriptures does not purify the mind. The Master said: 'The scriptures contain a mixture of sand and sugar, as it were.' If it were possible to take only the sugar by discarding the sand, or the essential principle from the mass of scriptural discussions, then only could one gain the fruit of scriptural study.

That is why the scriptures themselves say that the search for their meaning will be futile unless they are taught by a guru. Why is it so? The guru knows which path is suitable for the disciple. The attainment of knowledge becomes easier when he shows the way after due assessment. If one depends upon his own intelligence or tries to understand the significance of the scriptures independently, he is likely to land in trouble. This is because the instrument with which we study the scriptures is so tainted that it fails to reveal the truth. So the scriptures say: 'The knowledge that is acquired from the teacher alone surely becomes the best.'⁶ Other learning is as good as ignorance. The meaning of the scriptures can be

understood only when they are heard from the lips of one who has indeed realized their true significance. Therefore the guru must be one who has realized Brahman; he teaches his disciples according to their needs and aptitude.

It is precisely for this reason that the Master taught each one of his disciples separately, and in a different manner. Maybe some would say that the Master gave his best teachings to his monastic disciples, that he reserved butter for them and offered only buttermilk to others. But that is not so. Butter is not a suitable diet for all. As all preparations do not suit the stomach of all her children, a mother cooks different items. One day the Master asked Narendra after he had eaten thin pieces of bread along with other items prepared by the Holy Mother, 'How did you enjoy the food?' Narendra replied, 'It was like a sick man's diet.' Then the Master told the Holy Mother: 'Look, prepare thick pieces of bread and thick soup for Naren. Only then will it suit him.' In the same way, the Master repeatedly said that all teachings were not meant for everyone.

Love for Love's Sake

The Master spoke about selfless love. Such a love is free from all desires and is spontaneous. Prahlāda had such selfless love. A devotee like him says: 'O God, I do not want wealth, fame, creature comforts, or any such thing. Please grant me the boon that I may have genuine love for Thy Lotus Feet.' It has been said in the *Bhāgavata*: 'It is true that sages who are absorbed in the Self are not in need of book-learning. But they are endowed with spontaneous devotion, motivated by no self-centred desire. Such is the inherent attractiveness of Sri Hari that even such contemplatives steeped in the Ātman-consciousness, are drawn to Him.'⁷ There is no reasoning, no craving either. They simply love God. So it is called 'selfless love.'

The Ātman is naturally loveable. Everyone loves his own self for no apparent reason. Other things are loved because

they satisfy the self and meet its needs. The Ātman is that which is naturally lovable due to its intrinsic quality and not for any other reason. Therefore it is lovable by its very nature and we cannot help loving it. If love for the Ātman is viewed from this angle, then there is no need of any other motivation.

'It is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of speech, and it is the Life of life.'⁸ One that abides behind everything is naturally loved by everyone. The Lord speaks of four classes of devotees in the *Gītā* : 'Four kinds of virtuous men worship Me, O Arjuna—the afflicted, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the man of knowledge, O bull among the Bhāratas.'⁹ Four classes of people—the afflicted; the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the man of knowledge adore God. Of them the man of knowledge, who loves God after realizing His essence is called by God his 'very Self'. Thus he is the best. 'All of these are indeed noble, but the man of knowledge is my very Self.'¹⁰ Since he is God's very Self he has no motive for his love.

In the *Gītā* the afflicted and the seekers of wealth are not despised. They too are great. It is always better for those afflicted by worldly sorrows to seek refuge in God rather than weep in despair, just as it is better to pray to God for the fulfilment of any desire instead of resorting to deception to gain one's end. Examples of pure devotion are rare, as it does not come without total desirelessness. To pray to God for the fulfilment of any desire is not despicable, but better still is to desire Him only. The Master used to say that praying to God for worldly things is like asking for gourds, pumpkins etc. from a king. It is idiotic to pray for trifles to one who is the King of kings. But to seek Him one has to give up everything. So, without total desirelessness, there cannot be selfless love. Nonetheless, while practising devotion desires get reduced and the mind becomes purified. As the Master put it, when tears wash away the mud on a needle, it feels the attraction of the magnet. The irresistible attraction a person feels for God after he is purified is selfless. A person then does not approach Him

for the purpose of gaining fame or riches; nor does he treat God as a means of attaining worldly enjoyment. Seeking Him for His sake alone is the consummation of an aspirant's love.

The Master was Supreme in all Ideals

The Master entreated the doctor to cure his disease so that he could resume chanting God's name. On the contrary, the doctor advised him to meditate. The Master replied, 'Why should I lead a monotonous life?' The Master was averse to following only one path as he wanted to enjoy God in various forms. To see Him in all possible ways and to realize His true nature in as many ways as possible is the supreme goal of an aspirant. The Upanishads say: '[The Self] is possessed of all good desires, is possessed of all good smells, is possessed of all good essences ...'¹¹ He pervades whatever we see and all our experiences are in and through Him. That is why, even while watching the brawls of drunkards, which arouse base feelings in most people, the Master would pass into samādhi. He was unique. When the aspirant attains consummation in his sādhanā, his mind is so pure that he enjoys God through all his experiences.

Sri Ramakrishna assumed a human form to show humanity the supreme state of all ideals. As the Incarnation of the age, his life is meant for everyone; his life is meant for human beings of all types, of all spiritual moulds. Each and every aspect of his life is helpful for one person or another. Can one whose whole life is for the welfare of humanity afford to limit himself to one ideal? Sri Ramakrishna enjoyed the bliss of God in different ways and thus set an example for the world so that people might become conscious of their spiritual goal and feel inspired to struggle for it. Had he not shown us the way it would have been impossible for us to proceed with conviction on the path.

The way all ideals have been harmonized in the life of Sri Ramakrishna is a rare phenomena. To a certain extent Sri

Chaitanya's life can be compared with his. Sometimes, Sri Chaitanya used to participate in group singing and dancing, and again at other times he would pass into samādhi, completely lost to the outer world. Like him, Sri Ramakrishna also used to experience all three states—bāhyadaśā, ardha-bāhyadaśā and antardaśā. In the state of external consciousness (bāhyadaśā) he sang and enjoyed bliss in the company of devotees. Sometimes he would dance, and sometimes he would remain silent in ecstasy. Again, sometimes he would pass into deep samādhi, completely lost to the outer world—quiet and lifeless, as it were. There is nothing inferior or superior about any of the states. He enjoyed the bliss of God in different ways, and this variety itself was the object of his enjoyment. There would have been nothing wrong if Sri Ramakrishna had remained immersed in samādhi instead of enjoying the bliss of God in various ways. But he appeared as the personification of the harmonization of all ideals so that all might find in him the culmination of their individual ideals. This is the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna's incarnation. Had it been otherwise, the revelation of his glory would have been restricted, as it were. Such a perfect manifestation of all ideals in one person, perhaps, had never occurred in the world before. Swamiji has specially stressed this. In the spiritual history of the world he is unique. The world had never before witnessed such a combination of jñāna, bhakti, and yoga. It was not simply out of his deep sense of veneration for the Master that Swamiji, who was otherwise very rational, said this. Only after observing the Master over a long period did he arrive at this conclusion.

The Finite Mind and God

The Master said something else to Dr. Sarkar while discussing the latter's son: 'There is not a fellow under the sun who is my disciple. On the contrary, I am everybody's disciple. All are children of God. All are His servants. I too am a child of

God. I too am His servant. "Uncle Moon" is every child's uncle! This statement of the Master should be understood properly. How is it that the Master never tried to pose as a guru? What is the inner meaning of this? He appeared in the world to grant spiritual knowledge to everybody. This he said himself on a few occasions. But now, having established himself on a different plane, he has said something contrary to what he had said earlier. It is like Sri Krishna saying: 'O son of Prithā, human beings follow My path in every way.'¹² This 'I' cannot be the two-armed flute-playing Sri Krishna since it is not true to say that everybody adores only that particular form of God. There are devotees who do not want to see Him in that form. Therefore, when the Lord says, 'Human beings follow My path in every way', we should understand that He does not have in mind any specific finite form of His. He refers to that form from which emanate all forms and in which they all dissolve. If we fail to realize this clearly there will arise doubts, uncertainties, and differences of opinion. The significance of the Lord's statement above is that the various individual forms we perceive as separate from each other are essentially only His form. He has been revealing Himself in many forms. His other name is 'Vibhu', which means—'He who reveals Himself in various forms.' It is not that some form of His is superior while others are inferior. He who is immutable and an indivisible Principle cannot have any part. It is said in the *Bhāgavata*: 'Sri Krishna is the Lord Himself; others are parts and particles of the Supreme Being.'¹³ Here the word 'parts' signifies that in others His manifestation is in a lesser degree. We need to understand whether such differences in manifestations are due to variations in the capacities of the Incarnations or due to the varying capacities of the aspirants who have realized those forms. The aspirants who have realized the Truth differ in their spiritual potentialities, and the forms revealed to them also differ accordingly. But the One who manifests Himself in various forms is Himself beyond all forms. He is both immanent and transcendent. It is indeed an

unpardonable offence to limit Him who is omnipresent, all-knowing, the inner controller of everyone, and who transcends everything. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'One cannot put a limit to God.' Never think that He can be this alone and nothing else. Enjoy God's bliss as much as you can but know for certain that He cannot be bound within the limits of your mind. A finite mind can never grasp His infinite nature. Throughout the ages, His manifestation varies according to the variations in the capacity of the medium. But that manifestation which abides everywhere, surpassing all partial revelations, is His true nature. The other revelations are also His, but He exists transcending all those revelations. The Master laid stress on one thing: It is not that He does not exist, or exists only partially, in places where we fail to experience His presence. In each and every speck of dust He is present in His entirety. Every drop of water contains the entire ocean. But because of our inability to perceive the macrocosm there, we perceive Him as the microcosm. The macrocosm does not change into microcosm. It is we who find it convenient to perceive Him in the microcosm, but this does not affect His macrocosmic essence. We must understand this truth.

The significance of the Master's statement, 'There is not a fellow under the sun who is my disciple,' is this: By 'I' is meant here the body, the covering which people identify themselves with. The Master always asserted that this form is nothing. He is immanent in it and transcends it as well.

'Only a small portion of God comprises this whole creation, while His major portion is His true nature as consciousness, which is immutable and not subject to creation.'¹⁴ Thus, however much we may stretch our imagination, it is impossible to completely understand Him. Again and again the Master would remind the devotees of this. So if we try to understand the meaning of the scriptures from this point of view, we do not have to think of Him as existing anywhere partially. It is all He, whether manifesting fully or partially. Again, He also transcends all these manifestations.

That is why the Master used to say: 'See Him in the world as well as beyond it. He abides in His fullness everywhere.'

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Param bhāvamajānanto mama bhutamaheshvaram.*
— Gītā, 9.11
2. *Adhikārinamāśāste phalasiddhirviśeshatah.*
— Vivekachudāmani, 14
3. *Naishā tarkena matirāpaneyā...*
— Katha Upanishad, 1.2.9
4. *Na vedayajñādhyayanairna dānaih...*
— Gītā, 11.48
5. *Nānudhyāyād bahun śabdān vācho viglāpanam hi tat.*
— Brihadāranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.21
6. *...Āchāryāddhaiva vidyā veditā sādhishtam prāpatiti...*
— Chāndogya Upanishad, 4.9.3
7. *Ātmārāmascha munayah nirgranthā apyurukrame;
Kurvantyahaitukīm bhaktimittambhutaguno harih.*
— Bhāgavatam, 1.7.10
8. *Śrotrasya śrotram manaso mano yad,
Vācho ha vācham sa u prānasya prānah.*
— Kena Upanishad, 1.2
9. *Chaturvidhāh bhajante mām janāh sukritino'rjuna,
Ārto jijnāsuarthārthī jnānī cha bharatarshabha.*
— Gītā, 7.16

10. *Udārāḥ sarva evaite jñānī tvātmaiva me matam.*
— *Gītā*, 7.18
11. *Sarvakāmah, sarvagandhah, sarvarasah...*
— *Chāndogya Upanishad*, 3.14.4
12. *Mama vartmānuvartante manushyāḥ pārtha sarvaśah.*
— *Gītā*, 4.11
13. *Ete chāmsakalāḥ pumsah Krishnastu Bhagavān svayam.*
— *Bhāgavatam*, 1.3.28
14. *Pādo'sya viśvā bhutāni. Tripādsyāmritam divi.*
— *Rig Veda*, 10.90.3

CHAPTER 54

The Gospel (October 25, 1885)

Sri Ramakrishna and Doctor Sarkar

In the *Gospel* Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar has been discussed in several places; this is one such. The doctor believed that God is formless, infinite, and is beyond mind and speech. He could not even conceive that God who is beyond the intellect can appear assuming a human form and accept the sufferings of birth and death, diseases and bereavements. He therefore did not believe in Divine incarnations. He had the highest regard for Sri Ramakrishna, and finding a complete revelation of his personal ideal in the Master, he greatly revered him as a perfect being. But he was against thinking of him as an Avatāra. On this issue he would have heated debates with those who believed that Sri Ramakrishna was a Divine Incarnation. The Master was unique in that, without disturbing anyone's attitude, he helped everyone progress along his or her own path. But this does not mean that he accepted without protest all that the doctor said. He sometimes told his disciples, 'You answer him.' At times he would add a couple of words to make the replies clearer. It did not really matter if the doctor accepted the Master as an Incarnation or not; he only wanted the doctor to be freed from the fetters of his intellect.

The real purpose, or deeper significance, of each of the Master's actions was never revealed just by observing his behaviour. At times the purpose might be partially revealed to one endowed with very sharp insight, or it might come to light

when the Master himself explained the rationale behind some action. Hearing that Dr. Sarkar had been 'thinking of the Paramahansa since three in the morning' and that this continued till eight o'clock, the Master said, laughing: 'You see, he has studied English. I cannot ask him to meditate on me, but he is doing it all the same.' Why did the Master laugh? He laughed because he could see how, through him, the Divine Mother had spread an intense force all around in order to attract others. He never thought for a moment that he was doing anything, or that it was the effect of his own personality; he knew that he was an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother, and he laughed, witnessing the sport of Mahāmāyā through that instrument. This was how the Mother made the doctor think about the Master. It is hardly of any consequence whether the doctor acknowledged the Master as an Incarnation or not. He came to see a patient and was entrapped in the Master's net. It was indeed difficult to get out of this net, a net that had spread throughout the world. The pecuniary loss he suffered when he neglected his duties was a matter of concern for him, but he had become possessed by such an irresistible attraction that he was unable to free himself. Slowly he was accepting the Master's ideas.

The doctor said, 'There exists in God sattva, rajas, and tamas.' While examining the Master he did not talk much about the disease; rather he would say: 'The illness you are suffering from does not permit the patient to talk with people. But my case is an exception. You may talk to me when I am here.' It is understandable that he developed an intimate and sincere relationship with Sri Ramakrishna. And whenever the depth of the relationship clashed with his firm latent tendencies he also lodged protests.

It was M.'s duty to report daily about the state of the Master's health to the doctor. He was doing that now. During the conversation a reference was made to Mahima Chakravorty. On the previous day, when the doctor had come to examine the Master, Mahima had said to the Master: 'Sir, you

yourself have created the disease in order to pamper the doctor's pride.' He meant that the Master voluntarily accepted the disease. It had not come about following a chain of cause and effect and if he wished, he could shake off that which he had voluntarily accepted. The doctor thought that in Mahima's opinion the Master could cure his disease by some extraordinary means which was unknown to him. The doctor was annoyed by Mahima Chakravorty's comments, so he said, 'How full of *tamas* he is!' And to his friends he said, 'The illness is no doubt incurable, but these gentlemen have been nursing him with sincere devotion.' His statement is worth noting: 'These *gentlemen* have been nursing him with *sincere devotion*,' and not his *devotees*. He was firm in his belief that Sri Ramakrishna was not an Incarnation but a man, so how could he have devotees? The doctor used to praise the nursing of the devotees, and indeed, drawn by their sincere nursing, he surrendered himself to Sri Ramakrishna and accepted the responsibility of treating him.

The Avatāra Sporting as a Human Being

When an Avatāra appears he attracts people in various ways. He develops different kinds of relationships with his devotees. Sri Ramakrishna established one relationship with the doctor. He had another kind of relationship with Girish Ghosh, another with Ramchandra Datta, and with Narendra he had a totally different kind of relationship. Those who have not witnessed the differences in his behaviour with the devotees will fail to realize this. The Master laughed when Girish insulted him using vile language. At the Cossipore garden house he served Girish with fried snacks bought from a shop. Though he lay critically ill and was unable to move, he somehow raised himself to draw water from a pitcher to serve Girish. What a touching gesture of love and affection! Girish kept shouting disparaging remarks, saying: 'You'll get back whatever you've given to me. You gave me poison. Now take

back the poison.' On another occasion, Girish, while drunk uttered indecent words to the Master when he had gone to Girish's theatre. The Master had merely smiled and left the hall. Thus, he had different kinds of relationships with his different devotees! In how many ways did he reveal himself! This unique feature shows his divinity. The Master was thoroughly conversant with all the different paths to God-realization. That is why he asked each aspirant to meet him individually. In the midst of a crowd he could not teach the path that would suit a particular individual. He led everyone forward along his or her own path. The Master even accepted paths which were considered ignoble in society. However, he cautioned his disciples: 'Those paths are dirty and unsuitable for you.'

This was his uniqueness. Our minds are filled with doubt when we think how Sri Ramakrishna, who was purity personified and the epitome of perfection, could have accepted such ignoble paths. Indeed, this shows his limitlessness. Now, the world is God's creation. If He is pure then everything should be pure. But that is not so. Then from where does this impurity come? The world has not come from anything other than Him. Then it is He who is the source of both purity and impurity. The advocates of other religions say; 'Impurity is Satan's handiwork.' But from where does this Satan come? If he has not come from God then his coexistence with God is proved. Our scriptures say that since God is the Creator of the whole universe, He cannot be exclusively good or bad. He is both good and bad. When one gets merged in Him, the duality of good and evil ceases to exist. The Master says that when one goes up in the Monument (that is, the Ochterlony Monument in Calcutta) one cannot differentiate between things that are big and things that are small. All this is difficult to understand unless it is seen in the light of Vedānta.

Sri Vijaykrishna Goswami arrived to see the Master after visiting many holy places in North India. He was once a preacher of the Brāhmo Samāj. The Master used to say that

whatever he might do (referring to his Brāhmo leanings), the seed of ecstatic love for God was innate in him and would sprout one day. Needless to say, having had the divine company of the Master, the seed of love within him sprouted, blossomed, and finally bore fruit. To Mahimacharan's inquiry as to what he saw at those holy places, Vijay replied: 'I realize that everything is here where we are sitting now. This roaming about is useless.' Expressing his agreement, Mahimacharan said: 'You are right, sir. Again it is he [the Master] who makes us roam about or remain in one place.' This means that unless the Master reveals himself, who has the capacity to remove the veil covering him and recognize him?

An Incarnation is beyond our reach. He descends on earth covering himself in such a way that even his intimate associates fail to recognize him. The Upanishad says: 'The face of Truth is concealed by a golden vessel. Do thou, O Sun, open it so as to be seen by me who am by nature truthful.'¹ The face, or vision of Truth—that is of the Parameśvara, is covered by a golden vessel. Why is it golden? The effulgence of the vessel is drawn from that Truth. What we see as the world of relativity is the manifestation of that Truth. 'I am by nature truthful, and my object of worship is that Truth. O Sun, the nourisher of life, do remove your covering that hides my view so that I may see.' It is like a small child asking his mother to remove her veil so that he can see her face. 'I am by nature truthful. I perform righteous duties. May he remove what is concealing Him so that I can see Him.' So Mahimacharan says; 'It is he who makes us roam about or remain in one place.'

The Master had a brief conversation with Vijay through gestures, the most abstruse language, beyond ordinary understanding. Suddenly Vijay fell prostrate before the Master, put the Master's feet on his chest, and clung to them. The Master was in deep samādhi, motionless as a picture. The devotees were overwhelmed by this wonderful sight. Some burst into tears and some chanted sacred hymns. Some stared at him in mute wonder, while others sang. Each reacted

according to his temperament. After a long time Sri Ramakrishna regained consciousness and spoke to M. rather shyly: 'Something happens to me in the state of divine intoxication.... I cease to be my own self.'

If an Avatāra always remembers his divine nature he cannot continue his sport as a human being. If He does not engage Himself in activities as a human being then the very purpose of his coming is defeated. Incarnations are not necessarily always conscious that they are Avatāras. Such forgetfulness was more in some Incarnations and less in others. Where an Incarnation's divinity is always pronounced, there his biographers, perhaps, tended to record his divine aspect with greater emphasis than they did his human aspect. As a result, his human activities paled into insignificance.

In discussing the life of Sri Ramakrishna we must specially keep in mind that his biographer, Swami Saradananda has highlighted very clearly the human aspects of his life, though he also recorded occasional glimpses of the divine aspects that flashed from within his human cover. But even such revelations occurred only by chance and not intentionally. As the Master reflected here: 'Something happens to me in the state of divine intoxication....' He came to sport as a human being, but when he was immersed in ecstasy he could not hold on to his human aspect. Then the veil dropped before the very fortunate few. Without this veil there would not have been any reason for his sport in a human form. The chronicler of *The Great Master* wanted us to look at an Avatāra more as a human being. While viewing him thus and analysing what we see, we find that the human aspect sometimes fails to conceal the God in him, and the divine aspect shines through. The veil falls away as he passes into ecstasy. For example: In a village, a person named Hari is acting as a king in a drama, fully dressed in royal attire. During a mock fight in the drama his royal robe falls off and everybody laughs: 'Why, this is our Hari!' Thus 'Hari' is his original form; the king is only the cover. The real nature of an Avatāra is God Himself. His human form as the

Avatāra is His cover. The disguise is necessary for the purpose of acting, in order to attract people. Otherwise, He would not be accessible on the human plane. The cover is necessary so that people may hold on to Him and not shrink from Him out of a sense of awe. We should always keep this in mind.

Sri Ramakrishna was discussing this state of his. While coming down from that state he was unable to count correctly. The numbers became: 'One, seven, eight, or some such thing.' In other words, in that state it is not possible to maintain the logic of this world, or the cause and effect sequence. Narendra said; 'It is because everything [in that state] is one.' Even in such a state of deep ecstasy the Master corrected the statement, saying; 'No, it is beyond one and two.' When everything merges into 'one', there 'one' does not exist either. So long as 'two' is there, 'one' is justified. So long as the drama continues, one, two, etc., are there. The moment the drama ends, the state is beyond 'one' or 'two'. Where there is no 'two', there is no 'one' either. Swamiji was incorrect from a very subtle philosophical angle, but the Master corrected even that. Where there is no dvaita there is no advaita. Advaita means the negation of dvaita. Then what is that reality? One? No, because describing it as 'one' will be an error. 'One' is a property which cannot be attributed to an attributeless Principle. Therefore, it cannot be said to be 'one'. So he said; 'No, it is beyond one and two.'

The Scriptures and the Ultimate Reality

The Master said; 'He is beyond the scriptures—the Vedas, Purāṇas, and Tantras.' Why is He beyond the scriptures? It is because the scriptures can only draw people towards God. As it has been said; 'He is not gross, He is not subtle, He is neither short nor tall.' It is stated thus: 'He is not this, He is not that.' Then what He is cannot be said. He is that which remains after all negation ends. In the words of Swamiji, 'Where rests hushed even speech of negation.' Where the chain of negation

ends, it is there that He is found. There He simply *Is*. In relation to what will we describe Him? In trying to explain Him we ascribe some attributes to Him; thereby He no longer remains as pure existence. The scriptures say; 'There the Vedas become non-Veda, or ignorance.' We may argue or reason only as long as we are in the plane of duality. In the incomparable words of the Master: 'Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner had it reached the water than it melted. Now who was there to tell the depth?' When a jīva, through continuous contemplation on Him, extinguishes its jīvahood, then who is going to explain? The jīva no longer exists as a jīva. We cannot attain Brahman by studying scriptures. It is repeatedly said that He is beyond the scriptures. He cannot be established through words. The Vedas are only a mass of words, and even they cannot establish His nature, though they are able to direct us towards Him. He is beyond all the three qualities. Sattva can show us the way to Brahman, but it is not capable of taking us there.

In that context the Master said that one who was interested in scholarship might be a rājarshi, but not a brahmarshi. 'If I see a man with even one book in his hand, I call him a rājarshi, though he is a jñānī. But the brahmarshi has no outer sign whatsoever.' The scriptures are insignificant to a genuine jñānī because he has realized the Truth which lies beyond them. Therefore, the scriptures are not as important to a jñānī as they are to ordinary people. Scriptures are like a letter. 'A man once wrote a letter to a relative, asking him to send five seers of sweetmeats and a piece of cloth.' The purpose of the scriptures ends in giving instructions. The aspirant then keeps moving along the prescribed path and no longer needs any scripture. He has only to proceed along the path.

Divine Manifestation and Realization

Regarding the Avatāra the Master said: 'God incarnates Himself on earth in a human body. He is, no doubt, present

everywhere and in all beings, but man's longing is not satisfied and his purpose is not fulfilled unless he sees God in a human form.' He is present everywhere, but He cannot be realized in His divine form everywhere. That is why a human being's purpose is not fulfilled. God has to incarnate. He has to show the manifestation of His special power at a special place. And seeing His manifestation of power, people get some idea of God. The Master has drawn the analogy of the cow's udder. God's nature is revealed in the Incarnation. The scriptures say that God is everywhere, but how can that help us? Are we able to see Him everywhere? Only by seeing His divinity specially manifested in a person can we feel inclined to believe: 'Well, He may be God.' Maybe we cannot fully comprehend His real nature, but we can at least understand that He is not like us. The qualities of God, as recorded in the scriptures, are greatly manifested in the Avatāra. If God does not incarnate, or if He does not come putting on a disguise, do we have the competence to understand Him? Can we have the least idea about Him if He appears before us in His true nature? Hence the disguise.

A question may be raised here: Why should He who is beyond all this make any such effort at all? There is no answer to this. He wishes to play like this with the world, so He has become the thief and the police and also the 'granny', as in the 'thief and police' game. He frees one and binds another, but it is He who is playing the different roles. That is why, after realizing Him in everything, when an aspirant says; 'You are the good, and again You are the bad,' his realization has attained fulfilment. It is to be realized that He has become everything. But His revelation in an Avatāra is indeed special.

The Master gave a hint: 'Hold on to the Avatāra.' That Avatāra came. Could all his associates recognize him? No, they could not. Nor did the Master reveal himself so clearly. Sometimes he only gave hints. Only very rarely before someone like Swamiji did he reveal himself shedding all his veils as if saying: 'Come, my boy, can you recognize me?'

Unless He reveals Himself in this way, who is really capable of recognizing Him?

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Tattavāṃ pushannapāṭrinu satyadharmāya drishtaye.*
— *Īśā Upanishad*, 15

CHAPTER 55

The Gospel (October 26, 1885)

For almost three months Sri Ramakrishna had been suffering from an incurable disease (cancer) in his throat. People flocked to the Master day and night. In spite of the excruciating pain in his throat, he welcomed them all. There seemed to be no limit to his solicitude for their welfare. The doctors, specially Dr. Sarkar, forbade him to talk to people, but the doctor himself used to spend six to seven hours in the Master's company listening eagerly to every word that came from his lips.

M. arrived at Dr. Sarkar's house to report the Master's state of health. Here also the doctor talked about the Master with M. The doctor respected Sri Ramakrishna, and having come in contact with him, developed some regard for those who visited the Master. The doctor asked M. rather affectionately: 'It is already late in the morning. Have you taken your lunch?... I have been thinking of giving a feast to you all [meaning Sri Ramakrishna's devotees] one day.'

The Doctrine of Kālī

When the subject of Mother Kālī came up, the doctor said that Sri Ramakrishna was a worshipper of Kālī. Most people of the Hindu community, who have only superficially studied the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, think that Sri Ramakrishna was a worshipper of Mother Kālī. There is nothing wrong in this. But many do not know or understand what Sri

Ramakrishna meant by 'Mother Kālī', and in which sense he used Her name. We consider 'Mother Kālī' as one of the goddesses of the thirty-three crore Hindu pantheon. M. said: 'But with him the meaning of Kālī is different.' He wishes it to be understood that what is called Brahman in the Vedas is addressed by the Master as the Mother. She is both with attributes and without attributes and also with form as well as formless. That which is Brahman is also Śakti. When thought of as inactive, It is called Brahman, and when thought of as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, It is called the Primordial Energy, Kālī. That which is attributeless and inactive is also with attributes and active. The primordial Energy behind all expressions of power is called 'Kālī' or 'Īśvara'. The word 'Īśvara' means He who controls. This 'Īśvara', who is the Controller of the universe is called 'Kālī' by Sri Ramakrishna. It is again that primordial Energy, the Controller of the world, which comes as an Avatāra for establishing virtue. Kālī means that primordial Energy from which emanate all Avatāras. It is eulogised in the 'Hymns in Praise of Śakti': 'It is Thee that creates, preserves, and dissolves, from Thee emerge all incarnations—Brahmā, Vishnu, Maheśvara, and so on.' It is also stated in the *Chandī* that She has become all the gods and goddesses. So Kālī does not mean just the goddess who holds in two of her four hands a sword and a severed human head, and dispenses boons and dispels fear with other two hands. She has various forms. It is Her energy that manifests the entire cosmos and again dissolves it. M. says, 'That which the ancient jñānīs called "Brahman", That which the yogīs call "Ātman", and again That which the bhaktas call "God", Sri Ramakrishna calls "Kālī".'

Normally by the word Kālī people understand a most frightening goddess. Some people think of Her as being full of tamas as she is engaged in the act of destruction. But on the one hand She destroys while on the other She creates. In the same form She is responsible for destruction as also creation. Thus, it becomes difficult for most people to comprehend Her. This is true of each of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu

pantheon. At the time of worship He is Parameśvara, God of all gods. Often we do not understand this and argue amongst ourselves over different gods and goddesses, thinking them to be different. In fact, that One Parameśvara assumes different forms; the form in which He creates, preserves, and destroys is called Kālī. It is stated in the *Chandī*: 'You are the power of Vishnu, and have endless valour. You are the *primaeva*l māyā which is the source of the universe.'¹ You are the power of Vishnu, i.e. non-different from the all pervading power which is Vishnu. Here Vishnu is not one of the trinity—Brahmā, Vishnu, and Maheśvara. Here He is the primal seed of the universe. This is how the form of the Omnipresent Parameśvari has been described.

Since the discussion was about Kālī, M. explained Sri Ramakrishna's idea in this regard to the doctor, who was influenced by the Brāhmo ideas and was unaware of the significance of the various gods and goddesses.

The doctor had been present in the Master's room the previous day when the devotees had experienced ecstasy. So he said: 'Yes, I witnessed that ecstasy. But is excessive ecstasy good for one?' M. replied, 'The Master says that an excess of ecstasy harms no one, if it is the result of the contemplation of God.' The devotion that many Brāhmo followers had towards the formless qualified Brahman was being undermined through the influence of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. The āchārya of the Brāhmo Samāj, Shivnath Shastri, said; 'Paramahamsadeva is a good man, no doubt, but he has confounded his head thinking too much of God.' His idea was that others should not be drawn to the Master's ideas, as that would harm the Brāhmo Samāj. The Master came to know of this and asked Shivnath, 'You have kept your head all right thinking about the insentient world, while I have lost my head thinking of Consciousness?' Shivnath somehow avoided the issue.

Ordinary people's idea is that thinking of God should be done in such a way so as not to affect their worldly affairs. If

the administration of their worldly affairs is affected by thinking of God, then such thinking is labelled 'excessive'. The Master has asked us to think: What is the purpose of life? If the purpose of life is the realization of God, how can contemplation on God ever be excessive? Man's goal is not the possession of sense objects. However, so long as one lives as a member of a family or group one has to live with restraint as regards one's spiritual aspirations. But in spiritual life such restraint does not help; it is rather harmful. In the pursuit of God-realization nothing is excessive.

The Doctor's Conversation with M.

The doctor took M. in his carriage to see the Master. On the way, the topic of Vidyasagar came up. M. told the doctor that even a celebrated man like Pundit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar showed great modesty and humility in the Master's presence; but he also said: 'But when I talked with him later, I found that he didn't much care for what the Vaishnavas call ecstasy. He shares your views on such things.' Getting some support the doctor added: 'Neither do I care very much for any such display of emotion as folding one's hands or touching someone's feet with one's head.'

Even atheists greet one another with folded hands. This is a conventional method of showing courtesy. In the same way, devotional feelings are expressed differently in different communities and countries. Some salute with folded hands, some bow down, and again some lay down prostrate. These are different ways of expressing human emotions. They cannot be labelled as proper or improper. Of course, any show of emotion without sincerity is bad.

M. wasted no opportunity to place the ideals of the Master before Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar. Now with the help of the analogy of a tub of dye (the story is discussed elsewhere) M. tried to make Dr. Sarkar understand that in Sri Ramakrishna one finds all the spiritual moods and attitudes. That is

why people of all sects and creeds enjoy peace and blessedness in his presence. M. further stated: 'Who can fathom his feeling and tell us the depth of his inner experience?' That is to say, it is indeed very difficult to understand his spiritual moods. Unless one is engaged in the yarn trade one cannot tell the difference between different grades of thread. Unless one assimilates within himself the Master's feeling, to a certain extent at least, he will fail to appreciate its greatness.

The doctor then enquired about the arrangements for the Master's nursing. He was informed that under the supervision of one of the older devotees, the young devotees were engaged in nursing the Master.

The doctor was curious about the Master's devotees. He was charmed observing their sincere service and devotion to their guru. Even then, however, he was not much influenced. We do not know if he was ever influenced at all. But he was always respectful towards the Master, and that made him broad-minded. There are several references to this in the *Gospel*. Perhaps it was beyond the power of anyone to keep Sri Ramakrishna at bay, having once come under his influence. Everybody used to be influenced by him, at least to a certain extent. His ideas penetrated faster and deeper in those who were good receptacles. Otherwise, they entered only superficially. But none who came to the Master could ignore his influence.

Accompanied by M., Dr. Sarkar reached the house at Shyampukur. The doctor used to come to see a patient, but after a few words about the illness the conversation would move on to other things. Today was no exception. The Master was talking about the futility of mere scholarship without discrimination and renunciation. We find this topic raised in the *Gospel* several times. Mere scholarship does not help us in realizing God. It is but an intellectual exercise. Merely taking in information without doing sādhanā is useless. Religion is not a matter of words. It is a matter of realization. Something uttered by one person may not make any impression on our

mind, whereas the same thing uttered by another touches our heart, because the latter is enriched with the wealth of sādhanā, which is sadly lacking in the former.

Sri Ramakrishna and Bankimchandra

Referring to the learned pundit Bankimchandra the Master said: 'I met him once. I asked him, "What is the duty of man?"' Perhaps humorously he replied; 'Eating, sleeping, and procreation.' He did not know to whom he was saying this. The Master was not one who would be reverential just because somebody was a socially respected person or a pundit. He was greatly annoyed at these words and severely reprimanded Bankim. Bankim did not feel hurt; he realized that it had been improper of him to talk like that with Sri Ramakrishna. So he requested the Master; 'Sir, please come to our house once.' The Master only replied; 'That depends on the will of God.'

Scholarship does not liberate either the scholar or his listeners. Learning increases one's vanity, which results in further strengthening of the shackles. We may know the Vedas, Purānas, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, etc., but may not care about crossing the sea of worldliness. We do not know how to swim. The Master said: 'How can a man who has the grace of God lack knowledge? It is the same with my words. No sooner are they about to run short than the Divine Mother sends a new supply from Her inexhaustible storehouse of Knowledge.'

Vanity and the Sense of Independence

The uniqueness of the Master was that he thought of himself as an instrument, whereas a pundit is proud of his scholarship. The Master knew that whatever words he spoke were the words of the Divine Mother. By Her grace even a fool may become wise. In this regard a beautiful verse from the *Bagalāmukhi Stotra* is worth quoting: 'The verbose becomes mute, a king a pauper, fire is cooled, the angry is calmed, the

wicked made good, the speedy one becomes lame, the proud is humbled, the all-knowing scholar is turned into an insentient zombie—as Thou desirest. Ever graceful, ever beneficent, O Bagalāmukhi, everyday we salute Thee.’² All this happens due to Her will. She controls everyone and makes of them whatever She wishes. It has been said in the *Gītā*: ‘O Arjuna, the Lord resides in the hearts of all beings, whirling all of them by his *māyā* as if they were mounted on a machine.’³ God resides in everybody’s heart and moves all creatures as if they are dolls mounted on a machine. Everybody is controlled by *māyā*; but they feel that they are acting on their own.

Whether we have any freedom of action or not is a question which often disturbs us. The Master said; ‘Without His will not even a leaf can move.’ It is also said in the Upanishads: ‘Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgī, the sun and moon are held in their positions. Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgī, heaven and earth maintain their positions...’⁴ In this way, everything in this world, sentient or insentient, is controlled by Him.

Naturally the question that follows is, since we are controlled by Him and have no independence, do we have to enjoy the fruits of our actions, good or bad? If a man is killed by a sword, then will the sword suffer the death sentence? The good or bad results accrue to the person using the sword. The instrument gets no merit or demerit. But He who runs the machine—that is, the operator who suffers the fruits of good and bad actions and who resides within everyone—is also none other than He. It is like the example of the ‘grasshopper’ given by the Master. Rāma has become everything. This is also illustrated in another story of the Master, (discussed elsewhere) where the monk who had been beaten up said; ‘He who beat me is now feeding me milk.’

God alone is the doer of good and evil actions, but we suffer because we are deluded by egoism. The ‘I’ sense which makes one feel; ‘I do this, I enjoy the fruits’ is the result of ignorance. That knowledge is true which makes one realize

that He does everything and that it is He who enjoys the fruits. This is taught in the story in which the brahmin who killed the cow put the blame on Indra (narrated earlier). We claim the credit for whatever good work is done. But in order to shake off our responsibility for the bad things we do, we say that it is He who is making us do them. While we suffer we complain: 'Why does He make us suffer?' But when we enjoy pleasures we do not say: 'Why does He make us enjoy these pleasures?' We forget then. This is the hypocrisy of our mind—the deception we commit on our own mind. He is as much within us as He is without. 'All that exists art Thou.' He enjoys everything residing everywhere.

The Master briefly narrated some of the realizations he had during the early days of his sādhanā. The significance of the Master being gracious enough to confide these things to Dr. Sarkar was, perhaps, that he wanted to impress some things on the doctor's mind. The doctor's scientifically-tempered mind refused to accept anything other than that which was directly perceivable or could be inferred. To the doctor all these spiritual realizations were shrouded in mystery. Therefore, the Master was referring to them in order to infuse new ideas in the doctor's mind.

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1. *Tvam vaishnavīśaktīranantavīryā*
Viśvasya bījam paramāsi māyā.
— Chandi, 11.5
2. *Vādī mukati rankati kshitipatirvaiśvānarah śītati,*
Krodhī śāntati durjanah sujanati kshiprānugah khanjati.
Garvī kharvati sarvaviccha jadati tvanmantranā yantritah,
Śrīnitye Bagalāmukhi pratidinam kalyānī tubhyam namah.
— Bagalāmukhi Stotra

3. *Īśvarah sarvabhutānām hriddeśe'rjuna tisthati,
Bhrāmayan sarvabhutāni yantrārudhāni māyayā.*

— *Gītā*, 18.61

4. *Etasya vā aksharasya praśāsane Gārgī suryāchandramasou
vidhritatau tishthatah, etasya vā aksharasya praśāsane Gārgī
dyāvāprithivyau vidhrite tishthatah...*

— *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 3.8.9

CHAPTER 56

The Gospel (October 26, 1885)

We are still discussing the issue dealt with in the previous chapter that God is revolving all creatures around, as if they are mounted on a machine. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'You know that I am a fool. I know nothing. Then who is it that says all these things? I say to the Divine Mother: "O Mother, I am the machine and Thou art the Operator.... I do as Thou makest me do." Before the power of God man is but a frail piece of straw.' In the *Gītā* the Lord has shown Arjuna that everything moves by His will.

Ignorance Breeds a Sense of Doership

One of the most hotly debated issues in philosophy is: whether we have free will or are guided by God's will. Many views have been put forward by different people. The Master has said in this regard that so long as we do not realize God's will, our sense of doership remains and we continue to feel that we are the doers. Ignorance is the cause of this feeling. With our limited vision we see that actions are performed with the help of sense organs, and identifying ourselves with these organs, we feel that it is 'our' work. On the other hand, one who sees that God is immanent everywhere, both in the sentient and the insentient, to him everything that happens is but God's will. And not only that, those who act and are acted upon are also none other than God Himself. Covered by ignorance and delusion, we fail to see the Controller who

resides within and think in terms of 'I' and 'mine'. But a jñānī sees that He alone is the doer and experiencer. '...There is no other witness but Him, there is no other hearer but Him, there is no other thinker but Him, there is no other knower but Him...'¹

Looking at this phenomenal world, a jñānī finds that a beautiful drama is going on where all the roles are being played by that One Paramēśvara. That one Lord runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds. He is in everything—sacred and profane, friend and foe, wicked and gentle. It is He who is all this. When this realization dawns on a person, then his sense of doership goes away. No longer does he complain that God has created this sorrowful world where we must struggle in a sea of troubles up to our neck. Who are these 'we'? Are they anything other than He? A deluded man, thinking himself separate from God, feels either happy or sad. At the same time, he blames God, imagining Him to be the supreme controller of it all. If a doll in a puppet-show could be aware of its dancing, it would think, 'People are applauding because *I* dance beautifully.' Since it is unaware that someone behind it is pulling the strings, it thinks itself to be the doer and worthy of praise.

We have to work with either of these two attitudes: everything is His will, or, we are free agents. So long as we practise spiritual disciplines, we do so of our own volition. Only the aspirant who has the feeling 'I am the doer' can be asked to perform sādhanā. This is a subtle question in the Mīmāṃsā school of thought. When the scriptures say, 'perform sādhanā,' it is to be understood that the aspirant has the necessary capacity or eligibility to do so. When one has the sense of doership, there is no use in saying, 'Everything will be as God wills.' It has been proved through reasoning that so long as we have the feeling 'I am the doer' the injunctions of the scriptures are applicable to us. The scriptures cannot direct one who is completely devoid of egotism. When a person realizes that he is not the doer he is no longer bound by the scriptures. He transcends the scriptures. 'What injunction or

prohibition apply to those who tread the path that is beyond the three gunas?² Therefore, injunctions and prohibitions are applicable only as long as one is under the control of the gunas. In other words, when a person loses all sense of doership, the scriptures no longer apply to him. And he feels that all his actions are due to God's will.

How do we give up the feeling that we are independent? One way is to contemplate thus: 'I am the changeless Ātman, devoid of all activity.' The other is to be firm in one's understanding that it is God who does everything. This attitude is like that of the devotees who think that not even a leaf can move without God's will. If by resorting to either of these two attitudes a person is able to give up his sense of doership, then he attains to the state which is beyond the three gunas.

Is the will free? Or is it subordinate to God's will? While examining this issue we mix up two different states and land ourselves in confusion. When we say that the will is free, it is to be understood that we are on that plane where we think ourselves to be the doers. But after God-realization the sense of doership no longer persists. One never feels then that one does anything. The Master's cryptic expression, 'I am the machine, and He is the operator,' deserves to be deeply thought over. It is impossible for ordinary persons to have this experience. When God's presence is felt everywhere and when it is realized that He alone does everything, then one doesn't find one's individual 'I'. That 'I' which was thought to be the self is no longer to be found. Instead there is only He.

That state is to be realized. Reasoning has so far failed to establish whether human beings have free will or are directed by God's will. This is because the experience of one who feels that he is independent cannot be denied through reasoning or inference. Again, nobody can shake the faith of one who directly experiences that everything happens by God's will. Unless one has a purified mind and intellect and experiences the Ātman, he cannot realize this truth. It is therefore natural that the debate continues.

Dr. Sarkar said: 'We work from a sense of duty and not for joy, not because there is pleasure in work.' The doctor meant that pleasure is not the goal of our work. Hedonistic philosophers say that the hope of pleasure instigates us to work. They believe that obtaining happiness or joy is the motivation behind work. Others put forward the opposite argument, that pleasure is not the aim. How do we resolve all these conflicting ideas? A person prefers one or the other according to his or her inclination.

Free Will: The Master's View

Regarding free will, there is another idea which stands in between, as it were, the two views. The Master also said; 'Even though not in full measure, God gives man a little freedom.' However, man is not free to the extent that he can do whatever he likes. It is like a cow tethered to a post. It can move about only to the extent the tether allows it but not beyond. The Master cited this example elsewhere. He also said; 'If the master wills, the length of the tether can be extended a little more.' This only refers to relative freedom. This does not indicate whether there is total freedom of action or not. One is capable of 'either doing or not doing, or of doing otherwise'.

Listening to the discussion M. said to himself: 'It is difficult to say whether one feels happiness while performing the duty or afterwards. Where is the free will of a man if he performs an action, being impelled by a feeling of happiness?' That is, the Hedonists' view of human freedom does not appear to be tenable. Human action becomes governed by the desire for happiness. Should happiness be identified with God then it would appear that everything happens at His will.

Sri Ramakrishna's idea is precisely the same. He has mentioned the cow tethered to a post just to explain relative freedom. Even within bondage there is an element of freedom; otherwise who will teach religion and to whom will it be

taught? The scriptures are there so that some may act according to their injunctions. At the very beginning the doctor asked the Master; 'Why do you talk so much to bring knowledge to others?' Beautiful indeed was the Master's reply: 'He makes me talk; therefore I talk. "I am the machine and He is the operator."' The operator who runs the machine is responsible and not the machine itself.

Physicians and Service

The previous day the discussion had turned to the work of doctors. In this regard the Master said: 'The physician is undoubtedly a noble man if he treats his patients free of charge, out of compassion and moved by their suffering.... The medical profession is certainly very noble if the physician devotes himself to the welfare of others in an unselfish spirit.' A person is in distress, and taking advantage of it, a physician earns money. Food prepared out of money earned in this way is impure, and the Master could not accept it. This, however, does not apply to all physicians. According to the Master, those physicians who perform their duty in a spirit of service are doing noble work. In fact, any work impelled by self-interest is mean, whereas work performed selflessly, for the good of the world, is noble. This is the only touchstone to test whether a work is good or bad, or high or low. When the doctor talked about service to living beings other than human beings, the Master said: 'Bravo! That's grand. Holy men should feed other creatures.' The idea is that any work done selflessly, for the good of others, is indeed noble.

Swamiji's Vision and Vijaykrishna

Vijay came to see the Master. While talking with the other devotees Vijay said: 'I feel as if someone were always moving with me. He shows me what is happening even at a distance.'

Narendra added: 'Like a guardian angel.' It was as if someone was keeping watch on him and directing him to the right path.

Vijay further said: 'I have seen him [meaning the Master] in Dacca. I even touched his body.'

The Master said with a smile: 'It must have been someone else.'

Narendranath added: 'I too have seen him many a time.'

Swamiji said on other occasions also that he had many such visions of the Master. Once he was studying at night in his room, which was closed on all sides, and the Master appeared there. So he said to Vijay; 'How can I say I do not believe your words?' Swamiji was blessed many times with Sri Ramakrishna's vision and advice while the latter was alive and also after he left the mortal plane. What is more, even Swamiji's speeches were dictated to him by the Master. Of course, Swamiji never said that the Master had done so. He said someone would come to him and tell him what to say.

The personalities of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji complement each other. The Master's inexhaustible power was revealed through Swamiji. The Lord's appearance with Swamiji as His helper is an extraordinary phenomenon, which human intelligence cannot explain. We just have to place our trust on that which we cannot comprehend.

It is said in the *Bhāgavata* that before his appearance, Sri Krishna asked the other gods to descend to assist him in his work. It is like what the Master said: 'When you pull one part of the kalmī creeper, all the branches come away. You are all relatives...' The relationship amongst them was not of this world. They appeared for the good of humanity. 'A band of minstrels suddenly appears, dances, sings, and departs in the same sudden manner.' While some people may have vaguely recognized them, others could not. But the impact of their work remains for a long time. Swamiji has said that Sri Ramakrishna's inexhaustible power is working throughout the world ever since he gave up his physical form. While he was in

his gross body the power was limited, as it were, to a small area, but after shedding the physical body he began working throughout the world in his subtle form. He still works and so do his companions. There were several supernatural incidents connected with Sri Ramakrishna, but Swamiji advised people not to give any importance to them. He never encouraged mystery-mongering. It weakens the mind and then the intellect does not function. Very often these things distract us from the goal.

Swamiji said to Vijaykrishna; 'I too have seen him many a time.' The meeting appeared to be that of the inner circle of devotees. One cannot disbelieve that which is directly perceived. Being unable to deny his own experience, Swamiji could not disbelieve Vijay's words. Notwithstanding this, Swamiji was against publicizing these things. We should remember this. Therefore he used to advise the devotees of the Master that though such incidents were not untrue, they should not be played up as important. They were not publicized during those days; neither is much importance being attached to them nowadays. In *The Great Master* only some such incidents are narrated, and that too with great restraint. Swamiji felt that our judgements should be guided by our intellect.

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- 1 ...*Nānyo'to'sti drashtā, nānyo'to'sti śrotā, nānyo'to'sti mantā, nānyo'tosti vijnātā...*

— *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 3.7.23

2. *Nistraigunye pathi vicharatām ko vidhih ko nishedhah.*

— *Śukāshtaka*

CHAPTER 57

The Gospel (October 26, 1884)

Selfless Love

Sri Ramakrishna was explaining 'love without any selfish motive' to the devotees gathered at the Shyampukur house. A devotee having such love wants God alone. The love which is tainted with any desire is not selfless. The Master cited the examples of Ahalyā and Nārada, and further explained: 'It is like seeking God alone, and not asking Him for wealth, fame, bodily comforts, or anything else. This is called pure love.'

The scriptures say in this regard that we love objects of enjoyment because these are dear to us. We love our home because it belongs to us. A mother loves her child because it is 'her child'. It is the same with everything in this world. We love objects because they give us pleasure. Then why do we love ourselves? There is no reason. The Ātman is naturally loveable. By its very nature it is dear and not for any reason. The reason we love sense objects is that their association gives us pleasure.

But if we loved sense objects for their sake, then the affluence of others also would make us happy. A mother does not love others' children. It has to be 'her child'. The mind's attraction for anything in the world is centred around the need of this 'I'. All objects are conditionally dear to us because they give us pleasure. Why is God dear to the devotees? Because one cannot but love Him. He is our very self, the very essence of our being. So long as we do not realize Him as our soul—or,

for a devotee, as one's very own—we look upon Him as a means and not as the goal. We then love God merely because He will grant us riches, fame, wealth, children, long life, etc., and He will 'secure what we lack and preserve what we have' (*yoga-khsema*). But a pure devotee loves Him regardless of any consideration. He loves Him as the Self of his self. This is called 'love for love's sake'. It is to love Him as the goal. The Master added, 'But suppose I get a little joy from it; how can I help it?'

It is something to be thought over. Do we love because we feel happy, or do we feel happy because we love? There is a difference between the two states. When we feel happy because we love, there is no motive behind the love. As God is verily of the nature of bliss, one is filled with bliss the moment one loves Him. It is not that we love Him for the sake of bliss. The great devotee Kunti prayed to the Lord: 'O God! Pray, give me sorrows ever and ever so that I may always think of Thee.' Here the prayer for sorrows is to be able to remember Him. God is the goal, and not happiness. Here happiness is neither desired nor expected, but it comes of its own, unexpectedly. It is something which coexists with love. But a devotee does not love God for that.

Our work is inspired by the happiness which follows it. In this matter, however, philosophers have different views. Many of them say that pleasure is not our goal. If we are successful in reflecting an ideal in our life we feel happy. But we should keep in mind that we do not move towards the ideal aiming at that pleasure. Pleasure is not the motivating force; it is the good intention that drives us. When this noble intention drives us to act, pleasure inevitably comes to us. The Master says the same thing: 'But suppose I get a little joy from it; how can I help it?' This refers to that state. The idea is: Have I sought God as a means of getting pleasure? No, I haven't.

Referring to the prayer of Ahalyā, Sri Ramakrishna was trying to make us understand that there was no other motive behind her calling on God except attaining Him. Ahalyā said: 'O Rāma, I have no objection to being born even as a pig. But

please grant that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet. I do not want anything else.' Ahalyā had nothing to ask for, other than God and God alone. This is called pure love.

The Master also referred to Nārada's love. Nārada also wanted pure love. He prayed: 'O Rāma,... grant that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet and that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching māyā.' The question may be raised: Well, prayer by itself is asking for something; where then is the pure love? The Master said; 'The desire for bhakti cannot be called a desire.' Bhakti is centered only on God. Desire normally separates a person from God, whereas here, desire brings us closer to Him, so it is not harmful. The Master gave other beautiful examples: 'Sugar-candy does not fall in the category of sweets', or 'Hinche greens are not counted as greens.' The Master clarified this by saying, 'There is an element of joy in it, no doubt; but it is not worldly joy; it is the joy of bhakti and prema, devotion to God and ecstatic love of Him.' This joy finally unites a devotee with God.

Working as God's Instrument

The Master said: 'But there is a state higher than this.... As the child goes along, perhaps he sees a grasshopper and catches it.' The idea is that such a boy (though it's an analogy) does not act with any specific intention. The most apt example of this state is that of Śukadeva as described in the *Bhāgavata*. He moved about like a machine driven by God. Once the Master said: 'I'll come again as a Baul [a wandering minstrel]!' He will wander about, take his food somewhere, and again move on. There will be no trace of vanity or egotism. He will simply be an instrument in the hands of God. When Śukadeva is walking, it doesn't appear that he walks impelled by any desire of his own. He moves at God's will. When he is teaching he does so ordained by God. In the *Bhāgavata* the death of Parīkshit is imminent. Only seven days are left. A yajna (ritualistic sacrifice) is going on, and so are discourses

on God. Meanwhile, Śukadeva is walking, followed by a jeering gang of boys who, taking him to be mad, throw mud at him. It fails to create any impact on him. Divinely ordained, he thus reaches Parīkshit's assembly. All the assembled sages and saints stand up with folded hands, and so does Agni (Fire) from the sacrificial pit. Śukadeva is completely oblivious of his surroundings. Totally free from body-consciousness, Śukadeva does everything according to God's will and not his own.

Surrendering oneself to God completely as an instrument is possible only for a person who has completely effaced his ego. Unless one realizes God, one cannot hope to attain this state by self-effort. Scriptures tell us to practise dependence on Him. This is part of our spiritual practice. And in the course of our spiritual practice, when surrender becomes natural, then nothing is left to strive for.

Only an Incarnation or one who is established in the supreme Truth can work as God's instrument. The scriptures say that a jñānī does not have any egotism. However, driven by the remnant of his residual (prārabdha) karma the jñānī performs actions. But what about one who has completely exhausted all the fruits of his karma? He does not act of his own volition nor is there any prārabdha karma. There God's will alone controls him. He is kept by God as an instrument which is made to work for the good of the world.

We should specially note that the absence of ego in an ordinary person and its absence in one who has come as God's representative are different. While the former tries to efface his ego by sādhanā, the latter is born totally free from ego and performs actions directed by God.

The Attitude of a Servant

Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees: 'Don't you understand the doctor's inner feeling? It is a prayer of a devotee to God for right purpose, that he may have no

inclination for evil things. I too passed through that state. It is called *dāśya*, the attitude of the servant toward his master.'

Looking upon God as the Master, while considering oneself as His servant, and praying to Him thus, 'O Lord, take this servant along the right path to the goal,' is the attitude called *dāśya bhāva*.

Dāśya bhāva is one of the attitudes through which one attains God. Sri Ramakrishna was a world-teacher and so all attitudes were manifested in him. He practised spiritual disciplines through all attitudes—*śānta*, *dāśya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *madhura*. The Divine Mother wanted him to become a perfect instrument for doing good to the world and to direct and guide the followers of different faiths. That is why different spiritual moods were fully manifested in him. It is not that an aspirant has to assume one attitude after another. The devotee can enjoy the bliss of God-realization and attain the supreme Truth by following any one of the paths. Aspirants with varying tastes like to enjoy Him in different ways. Sri Ramakrishna's thirst was insatiable, as it were, so he enjoyed God by reaching the goal through all the different paths.

The Three Gunas and the Sādhaka

The Master said: 'When a man develops pure *sattva*, he thinks only of God. He does not enjoy anything else. Some are born with pure *sattva* as a result of their *prārabdha karma*.' Some acquire pure *sattva* over a period of time. From *sattva* mixed with *rajas* springs the tendency to do good works. Passing through this stage one finally reaches the state of pure *sattva*. The Master further said, 'To do good to the world is extremely difficult for such an insignificant creature as man.' We should bear this in mind: We are very insignificant. What good can we do to this world? Of course, under the influence of *rajas* one feels like doing different things. Everybody has to work. A person having *sattva* mixed with *rajas* finally acquires

pure sattva through unselfish action. First rajas, followed by sattva mixed with rajas, and finally pure sattva—this is how an aspirant progresses.

We should do only that which we are capable of, keeping in view our present state. Is it possible to say at the very beginning that we will not ask anything from God but will have the nature of pure sattva? No, it is not. Our efforts will be thwarted at each and every stage as we proceed. The reason is that we have not become free from desires. Who can become a person of pure sattva, or one filled with selfless love? According to the scriptures it is one who has taken refuge in God. Then why is selfless devotion taught at all? To let us know what the goal is. We shall have to attain to that level. The ideal is set before us with the advice to proceed step by step to reach the supreme goal. The ladder is necessary to help us reach the roof. But we should know precisely where we are going. Otherwise, after taking a couple of steps we may say: 'Well! we've gone far enough.' The Master cited the brahmachārī's advice to the woodcutter, 'Go forward.'

CHAPTER 58

The Gospel (October 27, 1885)

Sri Ramakrishna was staying at the Shyampukur house. Narendra, Dr. Sarkar, Shyam Basu, Girish and other devotees were present. That day Narendranath began to sing in a beautiful voice. Hearing a few songs the Master passed into samādhi. This was almost a daily occurrence. Whenever Narendranath had visited him at Dakshineshwar the Master had asked him to sing, and hearing his beautiful and spiritually-charged songs the Master would immediately pass into samādhi. That is why Narendranath's singing was specially dear to the Master.

Addressing the doctor, the Master said: 'Give up this false modesty. Why should you feel shy about singing the name of God? The proverb says very truly: "One cannot realize God if one is a victim of shame, hatred, or fear."' Many times shyness and diffidence keep us from chanting God's name. The thought should not come to our mind that people will feel differently about us if we take God's name.

The Master asked the doctor to give up this foolish notion: 'I am such a great man! Shall I dance crying the name of God? What will others think of me on hearing this?' This feeling of self-consciousness overcomes men of name and fame and does not allow their devotion to grow. When Dr. Sarkar said that he did not care what people say, the Master quipped, 'Yes, I know of your strong feeling about that.'

The Master knew Dr. Sarkar better than the doctor knew himself. The doctor would have been annoyed if anyone else

were to say this. But he knew that since the Master wanted everybody's good he did not bear any malice.

Types of Knowledge

The Master then began discussing a most abstruse principle: 'Go beyond knowledge and ignorance; only then can you realize God... God is beyond both knowledge and ignorance. Once Lakshmana said to Rāma, "Brother, how amazing it is that such a wise man as Vasiṣṭha wept bitterly at the death of his sons!" Rāma said: "Brother, he who has knowledge must also have ignorance. He who has knowledge of one thing must also have knowledge of many things."'

It is extremely difficult to comprehend the significance of this statement. We try to understand Truth through the process of reasoning, but we forget that such reasoning also falls within the purview of ignorance. The scriptures say: 'In that state the Vedas are no Vedas.'¹ That is, knowledge is also ignorance. The understanding we acquire about God through our intellect is not supreme Knowledge. Attaining supreme Knowledge means transcending all modifications of the mind.

By 'knowledge' is meant the different forms of the modifications of the mind. But true Knowledge—that is, knowledge of Brahman—is not a form of mundane knowledge. When the mind ceases to be the mind and assumes the nature of Brahman, then it is called the attainment of the knowledge of Brahman. Attaining the knowledge of Brahman does not mean knowing Brahman. One who says he has known Brahman has not known the nature of Brahman. It is said in the *Kena Upanishad*: 'If you think, "I have known Brahman well enough," then you have known but little about the nature of Brahman.'² The young disciple, having understood, says: 'I do not think that I know it [Brahman] well. Neither is it that I do not know, nor can I say I know.' I know and again I do not know. Knowing Brahman does not mean knowing it as an object of knowledge. We cannot know Brahman that way. 'I

know' means to be immersed in one's own Self, one's inmost being. This is indeed supreme Knowledge. One who has experienced that supreme Knowledge cannot express it in words. That is because as long as we are in the realm of words we are also in the realm of the mind. How can we express the Reality that is beyond the realm of the mind? Even many things of the material world cannot be expressed in words. Whatever we express in words first appears in our mind in the form of thought; thereafter we express it in words. But He is said to be even beyond the mind. Why? *Tatra manah amanī-bhavati*—'There the mind ceases to be the mind.' It becomes Brahman Itself.

This is something to be deeply thought over. One cannot realize the Truth through the words of the scriptures, or through the process of reasoning. Why? It is because the intellect, with the help of which we reason, is but a part of this insentient world. Buddhi (the intellect) is one of the manifestations of the internal organ (antahkarana). Again, the internal organ is only one of the forms of insentient objects, it is nothing other than that. And unless the internal organ is illumined by consciousness, it cannot express itself. The internal organ, inclusive of the mind and buddhi, is insentient. They are manifested only due to the radiance of consciousness which illumines them. It is like these houses and buildings. They exist, but in the absence of light everything appears dark and nothing is seen. In the same way, unless the modifications of our mind are illumined by the radiance of Brahman, or Consciousness, they remain unknown. Thus it is said that He is beyond mind. 'That which man does not comprehend with the mind, that by which, they [i.e. the sages] say, the mind is encompassed....'³ Brahman reveals the mind, but the mind cannot reveal It. Who will reveal the eternal Revealer? A lamp cannot reveal the sun. The light of the sun dims the lamp. Thus, our intellect cannot reveal Brahman. In fact, the intellect is incapable of revealing even itself. Brahman cannot be comprehended by the mind.

This statement of the scriptures has deep significance and is the cardinal principle of Vedānta.

Vedānta says: Brahman is self-revealing. No learning can reveal It, nor can language express It. If a person is able to understand this then he may have a faint idea of what supreme Knowledge (Brahmajñāna) is. 'Through his lustre all these are variously illumined'.⁴ By 'all these' is meant the entire cosmos, and that includes even the mind. This is the essential principle of Vedānta. What happens when we reason about Brahman with the help of our intellect? We try to remove the thorn of ignorance with the help of the thorn of knowledge. After the thorn of ignorance is removed we must throw away the thorn of knowledge as well. It cannot be retained any longer. In other words, the mind no longer retains its original nature when it is completely purified.

In the words of the Master, pure mind, pure intelligence, and pure Ātman are one and the same. What remains when the mind is totally purified? Nothing remains as such. Is there a void? No. That which illumined the mind remains. That which is self-revealed remains, and the mind disappears. This is 'discarding the thorn of knowledge'.

Advaita Sādhana

This is what we fail to understand. Since we acquire all mundane knowledge through our mind, we think that He also is realizable by the same means. But the scriptures say: No, He is not realizable through mind, though we should continue our efforts with the help of mind. The scriptures want us to follow the path: 'The (Self)... should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon'.⁵ For realizing the Self we have to learn from the scriptures and sages. We have to hear from the lips of those who have travelled along the path and realized the supreme Truth. But our efforts should not be limited to just hearing. It is necessary to reflect on what we have heard. If one listens with full attention, doubts will arise in the mind. The thought

process by which we reason to clear the doubts is called reflection (manana). Hearing (śravaṇa) should precede it, otherwise what will the mind reason on? Again, hearing without reasoning is of no use. A few words pass through our ears and that is all. They fail to bear any fruit. They do not enter our mind. If they really penetrated into our mind, we would pass through a stage of having doubts. And if that stage is neglected, the aspirant fails to reach the goal. That is why manana is absolutely necessary.

What is the course of reasoning that should be adopted? The scriptures say that the purpose of reasoning should be to ascertain the truth. Reasoning should not be used to show off one's scholarship or to rebuff another's argument. Here, reasoning is called vāda. The word vāda means a discussion which is carried on with the purpose of ascertaining and establishing the truth. It is necessary to understand this clearly.

There are occasions when the Master encouraged reasoning. Again, on other occasions he would tell people not to argue. This is because quite often intelligence becomes a hindrance instead of a help in determining the truth. The intellect may help one to reach the truth, and again it may keep one from understanding the truth. The intellect is then used to show off one's scholarship, rather than to enquire and ascertain the truth. If a person merely likes to exercise the intellect, instead of helping him, it becomes a retarding factor. It stands in the way. The Master had asked M. especially to refrain from entering into arguments. The Master was, perhaps, apprehensive that in the process of reasoning M. might interpret the Master's words according to his own understanding. Through M. he wanted to present his teachings in their original, true form, without any distortion.

Of course, only Sri Ramakrishna knew what his real purpose was. But we do not know of his having spoken to anybody else with the same force. He made M. swear thrice that he would not reason. He despised reasoning done solely to show off one's scholarship. One day a topic was being hotly

debated amongst the devotees. As he realized that it was all a vain bickering, he expressed his disapproval.

Purification of the Mind

In one of the Upanishads we find a sage explaining his teaching with an illustration. The disciple then requests him to repeat it, so the sage gives another example. Again the disciple asks him to explain further. In this way, when the disciple fails to understand even after many illustrations have been given, the sage finally says: 'My child! Have faith.' The supreme Knowledge is not obtainable by mere reasoning and argument. Reasoning can reveal only that which we can understand with our intellect. It cannot go beyond. It stops just prior to realization. Where reasoning ends the pure Self shines. Prior to that the Self manifests itself only through the veil of our mind and dyed with its colour, but its true nature is not revealed. The Self gets distorted by the mind. That is why the scriptures tell us to purify the mind.

So what should we do? In one place the scriptures say, '[Brahman is] that which man does not comprehend with the mind', and in another place they say: 'He is to be attained through the mind alone.'⁶ Two contradictory statements! We think about God through our mind because we have no other instrument with which to think of Him. Therefore, unless the mind, with the help of which we want to know Him, becomes pure and transparent, it only acts as a veil and fails to reveal Him in His true essence. For example, when we look at an object through a glass, the object appears before us affected by the qualities of the glass. There are glasses which can magnify a tiny object or reduce a big one or distort an object—all these things happen because of the qualities of the glass. In the same way, the mind is like a glass through which we look at objects. So the various objects which the mind presents before us are distorted by its qualities. The scriptures therefore say that the mind cannot reveal the true nature of objects.

What else can help us progress if not the mind? Nothing at all. Therefore, the scriptures say that Truth is to be realized through our mind. How is it possible? The scriptures reply that our mind must be made pure, guileless, and transparent. As we go on cleansing and purifying our mind we shall eventually reach a stage where our mind cannot distort things. Explaining the difference between the worshipper and the worshipped the Master said: 'It is like a light inside a lantern. One feels as if one could touch the light, but one cannot, on account of the pane of glass.'

This is a very beautiful illustration and it deserves to be seriously reflected on. The glass is very fine and transparent, yet it acts as a partition. We see an object through it but cannot perceive it in its real nature; that is, we cannot touch it. In other words, we are unable to realize it directly. We know it with the help of the instrument called the mind, and thus it is distorted by all the defects of the instrument.

Therefore, this mind is to be purified and brought to a stage where it ceases to be the mind. When that supreme Truth, which is of the nature of knowledge itself, alone remains in the mind then the 'mind' becomes 'non-mind'. He is self-revealing. The mind cannot reveal Him but only veils Him. When the mind is purified, that veil disappears and only He remains.

That is why the scriptures say that the mind must be purified by the mind itself in order to know Him. So long as the mind is used as an instrument, He remains concealed by it. It is not possible to transcend the mind. A sharp intellect, scholarship—everything is within the limits of the mind. Purification of the mind does not mean sharpening the intellect. It means removing its impurities. When the mind becomes pure and cleansed of all impurities it gets transformed into the nature of Brahman, and this is supreme Knowledge. As long as the 'thorn of knowledge', in the form of the mind, is not removed, one cannot claim to have known the Self and directly realized the supreme Truth. We must understand this.

REFERENCES

1. *Atra pitāpitā bhavati, mātāmātā, lokā alokāh, devā adevāh, Vedā avedāh.*
— *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 4.3.22
2. *Yadi manyase suvedeti daharamevāpi nunam tvam vettha Brahmano rupam.*
— *Kena Upanishad*, 2.1
3. *Yanmanasā na manute yenāhurmano matam.*
— *Kena Upanishad*, 1.6
4. *...tasya bhāsa sarvamidam vibhāti.*
— *Katha Upanishad*, 2.2.15
5. *...Śrotavyo mantvyo nididhyāsitavyah ...*
— *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 4.5.6
6. *Manasaivedamāptavyam...*
— *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.11

CHAPTER 59

The Gospel (October 27, 1885)

Sri Ramakrishna now spoke in greater detail about knowledge and ignorance. What we ordinarily mean by the word ignorance is not the sense in which the Master uses it. For him to know God is knowledge and not knowing Him is ignorance.

Egotism and Self-realization

The Master told the doctor: 'Look here. One cannot attain knowledge unless one is free from egotism. There is a saying: "When shall I be free? When 'I' shall cease to be." "I" and "mine"—that is ignorance. "Thou" and "Thine"—that is knowledge. A true devotee says: "O God, Thou alone art the Doer. Thou alone doest all. I am a mere instrument; I do as Thou makest me do."

Thereafter Sri Ramakrishna spoke about vanity: 'Those who have read a few books cannot get rid of conceit. Once I had a talk with K. about God. At once he said, "I know all about that."' The Master asked, 'Does one who knows go about telling everyone that he knows?' Rather, he becomes silent. There are people who become anxious to show off their scholarship after a little learning. When they ask a question, the purpose behind their inquiry is not to learn something. It is to create an opportunity to speak themselves! They are in the habit of speaking and not of hearing. Why do they speak? It gives them a chance to show off their learning. Thus, the

Master said rather sarcastically: 'Does a gentleman go about telling everyone that he is a gentleman?' Though others may praise him, he keeps silent.

He continued to speak about vanity. There was a scavenger woman at the temple garden in Dakshineswar who was extremely proud, all because she had a few ornaments. That is, she had nothing to be proud of, but whatever little she had she thought was hers exclusively. The Master would get annoyed seeing vanity in others. He would brand many as 'mounds of conceit'. A mound is a high place where water cannot collect. Teachings have no effect on such people. While teaching it is necessary to assess the qualifications of the recipients. Therefore the Lord says in the *Gītā*: 'Never should this [that I have taught] be declared by you to one who is devoid of austerities, or who is not a devotee, nor to one who does not wish to hear it, nor one who cavils at Me.'¹ Here the Lord advises not to hand down the spiritual knowledge to persons having characteristics mentioned in the above verse. Is it partiality? No it is not. The reason for judging the qualifications of the recipient is to see if the advice will be effective. It is useless to impart spiritual truths to one who does not care to receive them, or to one who out of egoism does not have any receptivity.

Jesus Christ said in strong language, 'Do not cast pearls before swine.' In the *Bible* it is said: 'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine,...'² Pigs do not know the worth of pearls. They prefer excreta. Therefore, the scriptures say that one must assess a recipient before giving him knowledge. Give money to one who is poor. What is the use in giving it to a rich person? Medicine administered to a person who is sick and feels he is sick, will work. Giving medicine to one who is neither sick nor feels so is useless. He does not derive any benefit from it. Therefore, the scriptural injunction is: One should assess the qualifications of the recipient before teaching spiritual truths. Only those who are qualified achieve success and reach the goal.

Understanding the Scriptures

We often wonder why those who are rich in spiritual knowledge do not distribute it to one and all? But the fact is, though the sages have unlocked the storehouse of knowledge, they do not find any takers. If there are no takers, what does it matter whether the storehouse is kept open or not? If knowledge is imparted to ineligible recipients then they apply it wrongly and distort it. The same teaching on Self-knowledge was differently understood by Indra and Virochana. Virochana, misunderstanding the teaching, came to consider the physical body to be the be-all and end-all of life, while Indra attained Self-knowledge after some time. So it is necessary to properly assess the seeker before imparting knowledge. Brahmā made Indra practise continence for many years to help him acquire the necessary eligibility.

In ancient days when young students would join hermitages (āśramas) as brahmachārīs, the guru used to give them various kinds of work that required hard physical labour, such as rearing cattle, tilling the fields, etc. Was the guru using them merely to get his household work done? Certainly not. They were made to work to help them develop a mind suitable for learning. Religious teachings do not produce any effect on us because we do not have the mental preparation to receive them.

Jesus Christ gave an example: A man once went out to sow grain in his fields. Some of the seeds fell on a path, and birds came and pecked them. Other seeds fell on stony ground where they were parched by the heat and withered away. Some of the seeds fell among thorny bushes, and the bushes grew around them and choked them. But some of the seeds fell on cultivated land, and they produced a good harvest. The obstacles that stand in the way of acquiring spiritual knowledge are to be removed first. The nature of this knowledge is not such that simply by hearing one can understand it. Is it like history or mathematics that with a few

words a teacher can make one learn it? This knowledge cannot be imparted that way. Mere hearing of spiritual truths without prior mental preparation fails to produce any effect. Therefore the scriptures warn us time and again not to impart this knowledge to someone who does not practise austerities, who is not humble or service-oriented. Why is humility considered to be a necessary qualification? Because the aspirant will then be mentally inclined to learn. And if he renders service, he will become fit for receiving the guru's grace. To attain knowledge of spiritual truths these qualities are absolutely necessary. For acquiring ordinary knowledge it is good enough to pay a teacher and learn from him. It is not necessary to render service to him. The purpose of education is to develop the whole personality and not to learn some facts and figures. In the words of Swamiji, 'Man-making, character-building education' is necessary. We are now suffering not only from the absence of education but also from bad education. Our sense of values has been eroded because we have lost faith in our ideals. These days the purpose of education has become either to secure a job or to do some research work for inventing something. Becoming rich and having plenty of objects of enjoyment—this has perhaps become the ideal of life nowadays. With such an attitude, the question of character-building does not arise at all.

Virtue and Sin and the Experiencer of the Fruits of Action

A devotee by the name of Shyam Basu asked, 'Sir, if God alone does everything, how is it that man is punished for his sins?' This question arises in the minds of many of us. If God does everything then whatever evil deeds are performed by us are also caused by Him; why should we be punished for them? If we are not independent, and are not the doers of deeds, then why should we be punished? If God uses us as instruments, the good and bad that accrue from our actions should go to Him who has used us, instead of devolving on us.

There is an error in this logic. First, if I perform actions under the control of God, then He who used me will also experience the results of the actions. But if I am not the doer, can I then be the experiencer? It is grossly erroneous to say that I am not the doer, yet I am experiencing the results. Experiencing the results is also an act, which is not possible if I am not the doer. If I am not the doer of an act then how can I experience the fruits of that act?

So one who acts will have to experience the results. Finding a splinter stuck in the tail of a grasshopper, the Master said, 'O Rāma, you've caused your own trouble!' You have put the splinter there and you only suffer pain. So it is to be understood that the doer is also the experiencer of the fruits of actions. Thus the question of God's being unfair does not arise. When we think that God makes us work while we suffer, we accuse God of being unjust. There is a beautiful story told by the Master and narrated in *The Great Master*—'A brahmin kills a cow.' [The story has been given earlier.] Overwhelmed by the praises of Indra, the brahmin declares, 'I have done all this.' Indeed, rare is the person who is not carried away by praise. 'I have done this, so naturally I am entitled to the credit'—this is the feeling entertained by most of us. There is a similar story in one of the Upanishads. Having achieved victory over the demons, the gods became proud. Then the omniscient Brahman crushed their pride, and the gods understood that they had achieved victory only by the power of the supreme Brahman.

When we realize Him as the supreme Controller of everything then vanity does not arise in our mind. Moreover, we cannot claim that we are suffering. I am but a mere instrument. I am neither the doer nor the experiencer. One who has realized that he is not the doer has also realized that he is not the experiencer. When we say we do not perform actions and yet we are suffering, then we have partly assumed responsibility for the actions and put the rest of it on Him. This is not maintainable. The Master did not enter into any

discussion on this, but he seemed to be greatly annoyed. He said, 'How like a goldsmith you talk!' Lest such a statement hurt anybody, Narendranath explained by saying, 'In other words, Shyam Babu has a calculating mind, like a goldsmith, who weighs things with his delicate balance.'

Giving the 'Power of Attorney'

The Master was of the opinion that such discussions were of no use. He said: 'I say: O my foolish boy, eat the mangoes and be happy. What is the use of your calculating how many hundreds of trees...there are in the orchard? You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Eat them and be contented. You have been born in this world as a human being to worship God; therefore try to acquire love for His Lotus Feet. Why do you trouble yourself to know a hundred other things?... one ounce of liquor is enough to intoxicate you. What is the use of your trying to find out how many gallons of liquor there are in the tavern?' The idea is: Take as much as you need and dive deep in it. On attaining the rare birth as a human being one should try hard to develop devotion and the attitude of self-surrender. Such ideas come to the mind when there is no faith, no devotion, and no sense of surrender. We weigh Him on our scale of justice and judge the errors and mistakes. It is as if we are asked to sit in judgement! Not realizing how insignificant we are, we try to judge God! That is why the Master said that there was no need to know many things. A little understanding would be enough to worship Him.

Without going into any arguments, the Master said: 'Why don't you give your power of attorney to God? Rest all your responsibilities on Him. If you entrust an honest man with your responsibilities, will he misuse his power over you? God alone knows whether or not He will punish you for your sins.' Our only duty is to see that the purpose of our life is fulfilled.

Referring to how a person can come to a wrong conclusion through the process of reasoning, the Master said: 'That's the one theme of you Calcutta people. You all say, "God is stained by the evil of partiality", because He has made one person happy and another miserable. What these rascals see in themselves they see in God too.' In fact, we make God in our own image and think He has a personality similar to our own. It is stated in the Bible, 'God made man after His own image.' That is to say, God created man like Himself. But Swamiji said, 'Man made God after his own image.' As we desire wealth and riches, we think of Him as being full of splendour, and we think He will grant us wealth. Referring to his own disease, the Master said: 'Do you know what good has come out of this disease? Many will run away seeing it.' Why? People will think: when the Master himself is suffering from a disease, what can he do for us?

Nachiketā's Inquiry About Truth

Yama tempted Nachiketā to dissuade him from seeking Self-knowledge. But Nachiketā was unperturbed and asked: 'I want knowledge of the Self. Does a jīva exist after death? What is my true nature?'

Then Yama said: 'You may live for as many years as you like, but, O Nachiketā, do not ask what happens after death. Even the gods entertained doubt with regard to this. You are young. Do not ask to know such a deep philosophical subject.'

But young Nachiketā was very intelligent. He replied: 'O god of Death, since you say that it is you alone who can give this knowledge, then give me that. Let the riches be yours. I have no need of them.'

People worship God for the sake of wealth and riches, and when these don't come their devotion fades away. The scriptures, therefore, say to draw our attention: 'We will describe a God who will make you happy in both this world and the world beyond. You will get wealth, and if you so desire you may also get liberation.'

Sri Krishna and Sudāmā

It is not that devotees never pray for mundane things. Sudāmā was a great devotee and a friend of Sri Krishna. His wife kept pestering him: 'We are so poor, and your friend is such a great king! Why don't you go and ask him for something?' Sudāmā was still hesitant, but one day he went to visit his friend. Sri Krishna heartily welcomed him and Sudāmā was overwhelmed. There is no end to God's playful sports. He asked: 'O my friend, what have you brought for me?' Sudāmā's wife had sent with him a few sweet balls made of puffed rice, but he felt shy to offer them. Sri Krishna himself searched and found them, and began to eat eagerly. Tears rolled down Sudāmā's face. He returned home satisfied at being able to feed his friend, but on the way back he thought: 'Well, I couldn't ask for what I had come for. I am poor. I brought such an insignificant thing, but he accepted it with such eagerness.' This thought made him happy. Subsequently, as it usually happens in the Purānas, Sudāmā's suffering and distress were removed. When he returned he could not find his small thatched hut. Instead, there stood a big palatial building. His wife welcomed him and escorted him inside. Overwhelmed, Sudāmā asked his wife, 'Whose building is this?' His wife replied, 'Your friend has done everything.'

A Devotee and Human Birth

The idea is that God can also provide for our worldly needs. But one should not feel tempted to establish a relationship with God for that. It is like what the Master says, 'Asking for gourds and pumpkins from the king.' Rather, one should ask for that obtaining which one will not have to ask for anything else.

Once a brahmin went to Sanātana Goswāmī, being so advised by Lord Śiva in a dream, to seek relief from his poverty. Sanātana said: 'There is a touchstone buried in the

sand. Take it and your distress will be removed.' The brahmin then dug up the sand and found the stone. It is beautifully described in a poem of Ravindranath Tagore:

Two iron amulets shine forth as gold
As soon as they are touched with the stone.

The beautiful poem continues. The brahmin finally saying:

That wealth, being enriched by which,
you do not care for a gem as a gem,
Grant me a fraction of it.
I bow down before thee and pray,
Saying this, into the river he threw the stone away.

The devotee says that he has no need of worldly riches. As in the case of Dhruva, even when someone approaches the Lord with some worldly desires, His divine influence removes that desire from the mind of the devotee. Instead, divine knowledge arises in him and the devotee wants the Lord alone.

The Master said: 'Leave aside reasoning about the inequities of God and do something that will sanctify your life.' God is beyond the intelligence with which one reasons about Him. The Master further said: 'Hem [a devotee by that name] used to come to the temple garden at Dakshineswar. Whenever he chanced to meet me, he would say: "Well, priest, there is only one thing worth having in this world, and that is honour. Isn't that so?" Very few indeed say that the goal of human life is the realization of God.'

It deserves to be thought over as to how many of us who say that God-realization is the purpose of life say this with genuine conviction. Wouldn't our life completely change if He were to become our only goal? Wouldn't the name, fame, wealth, and all the sense pleasures we now madly pursue become insignificant like straw? The Master wanted us to realize in our heart of hearts the true purpose of life. Indeed a human birth is rare, obtaining which one can realize God even

in this life. The scriptures have cautioned: 'These are three things which are rare indeed and are due to the grace of God—a human birth, the longing for liberation, and the protecting care of a perfected sage.'³ When these three are obtained, human life becomes fulfilled. We do not know when we will get this rare opportunity again that we have right now. So if we do not long intensely to make optimal use of it, if we do not remain ever alert or do not try our utmost to guide our life accordingly, then our human birth will not fulfil its purpose. The Master emphasized this point—God-realization alone is the purpose of human life.

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1. *Idam te nātapaskāya nābhaktāya kadāchana,
Na chāśuśrushave vāchyam na cha mām yo'bhyasuyati.*
— *Gītā*, 18. 67
2. Bible, St. Matthew, 7.6
3. *Durlabham trayamevaitad devānugraha hetukam,
Manushyatvam mumukshatvam mahāpurushasamśrayah.*
— *Vivekachudāmani*, 3

CHAPTER 60

The Gospel (October 27, 1885)

The Gross, Subtle, and Causal Bodies

Sri Ramakrishna's conversation with Shyam Basu as recorded in the *Gospel* on this date, is very significant. Both in Theosophy and in Hinduism the subtle body has been very elaborately discussed.

Shyam Basu asked: 'We hear a great deal about the subtle body. Can anyone show it to us? Can anyone demonstrate that the subtle body, when a man dies, leaves the gross body and goes away?'

Without going into much detail, the Master said; 'True devotees don't care a rap about showing you these things.' The idea is that true devotees do not like to show supernatural powers. Such display may earn them name and fame; but they are not after such things. They have hardly any desire for all that.

The Master then gave Shyam Basu a brief explanation of the gross body and the subtle body: 'The body, consisting of five gross elements, is called the gross body. The subtle body is made up of the mind, the ego, the discriminating faculty, and the mind-stuff. There is also a causal body, by means of which one enjoys the Bliss of God and holds communion with Him.'

The gross body is made up of five gross elements—earth (khsiti), water (apa), fire (tejas), air (vāyu) and sky (ākāśa). The mind, intellect, egoism (ahamkāra), and mind-stuff (chitta)—these make up the subtle body. The Master explained this

briefly here. Elsewhere it is said that the body made of seventeen components is the subtle body. There are five organs of knowledge, five organs of action, five vital airs (pancha-prāna), the mind and the intellect.

It is not that the subtle body is very tiny, or transparent, or thin like air. 'Subtle body' means that the elements of it are not perceivable by the sense organs. If it is not knowable by our sense organs then how do we know of it?

The scriptures say that these things are realizable by the yogīs. They can see or hear things that we cannot because they have a subtle vision. Without this subtle vision a subtle body cannot be perceived. When we say 'subtle' we are inclined to think that the object is visible under a powerful microscope. But no, this subtle body cannot be seen like that; because whatever is perceivable by the sense organs or with the help of an instrument, is gross and not subtle. That which is not perceivable either by the sense organs or with the help of any instrument is subtle. We should have a very clear idea about the difference between the gross and the subtle. It is often heard that at the moment of death the soul within us goes out like air, or like a flash of light. These are merely popular beliefs.

Members of the Christian Science Church say that our subtle body is made up of an element called 'ectoplasm', and it can be perceived by the sense organs. Though it cannot be seen with the eyes, it can be photographed. From our point of view this is unfounded and negates the scriptures. Once Swamiji was questioned about this. He said that he had seen many supernatural things, but he had not taken any decision about them. He didn't feel the need to take any decision either. There are seances where they bring down spirits, and other such things occur there. It is also claimed that spirits have forms and that their photographs can be taken.

But these things do not agree with our scriptures. Is it ever possible to take a photograph of the body that is made up of the mind, the intellect, and so forth? That which is gross can

be photographed. But a photograph cannot catch the elements that make up the subtle body. The knowledge that transcends the sense organs is mystic knowledge. The yogīs acquire a subtle perception by which they are able to know things that are beyond the sense organs. Once again, we should keep in mind that a subtle object is not merely something minute; it is not like water, or like air. As regards spirits, some say they have seen them, and others say they haven't. Those who have not seen them will always have doubts about it, while those who have seen them are unsure about their true nature. Therefore, it is useless to discuss these things or make an attempt to bring down subtle objects within the range of our sense organs. These are neither indispensable nor unknowable. To be able to perceive these things, one has to acquire the vision of a yogī. Ordinary human perception will fail. In the *Gītā* the Lord tells Arjuna; 'I grant you the celestial eye; behold My divine Yoga.'¹

Only he who can see these things and he who makes one see, can explain the nature of what is seen. Human beings can never see the Cosmic form of God without divine sight. Sri Krishna has clearly said: 'You can never see Me with these eyes of yours. You are My loving devotee, so I grant you the celestial eye, behold My divine Yoga.' Arjuna saw, but could he possibly make others see? If God desires He may grant us divine sight, but a human being cannot grant it. It may be pointed out that the sage Vyāsa granted it to Sanjaya. But Vyāsa was certainly not an ordinary person. An ordinary person is not even capable of seeing it himself. How can he show anything to others?

The Master said: 'There is also a causal body, by means of which one enjoys the bliss of God and holds communion with Him. The Tantra calls it the Bhāgavati tanu, the Divine Body. Beyond all these is the Mahākāraṇa, the Great Cause. That cannot be expressed by words.'

While mentioning the Māhākāraṇa the word 'body' is not used. Contemplation and meditation on God goes on in the

subtle body. Going further, he said that in the causal body one enjoys divine bliss. But here the word 'body' is not used in the sense that we normally use it. That kind of body is beyond our imagination.

Does the body which is made up of the mind, intellect and egotism—that is, the subtle body—possess hands, legs, etc.? We should understand that the word 'body' is used only because it has an ego. It is the ego through which we enjoy divine bliss, but it is not a gross corporeal personality with hands and legs. It is so subtle that no barriers can obstruct it. The Master said on many occasions that the gopīs used to meet Sri Krishna in their subtle bodies. There is a description in the *Bhāgavata* that a gopī was locked in a room, so after shedding her gross body she met Sri Krishna in her subtle body. This is the idea. If the egotism associated with the gross body is shed then the gross body falls apart. One will no longer have any relation with it. So long as the 'I' sense is associated with the body, the body belongs to the person. When that idea is given up, the gross body has nothing to hold on to, and the individual gets released from it. Then one reaches God in the subtle body. Thus here by 'body' is not meant something which is made up of the five elements.

Sri Ramakrishna says that the body with which divine bliss is enjoyed is the causal body. It is a higher stage than that of the subtle body. The subtle body goes from one world to another and from one body to another. None of the seventeen components that make up the subtle body is gross; there is no gross element in it. Therefore, one with a body made up of seventeen components moves about from one world to another. But it also is not capable of enjoying divine bliss. That state is subtler still. Hence, Sri Ramakrishna says that one experiences supreme bliss through the causal body. This classification is very interesting and is something to think about. He says further that He is Mahākāraṇa—the great Cause that transcends everything. In that state there is no personality nor any distinction such as 'I' and 'Thou.' The

Principle that is beyond all differences and beyond all qualities is Mahākārana (Turiya) which 'cannot be expressed by words'.

The Master did not elaborate further. One who reaches the state beyond these three states—the gross, the subtle, and the causal—attains to the state of Brahman. That state is Turiya which is called the fourth state in another sense. But truly it cannot be expressed in words. Turiya means that it does not have anything in common with the three states. It is beyond the three states of waking, dream, and deep-sleep, beyond the gross, the subtle, and the casual—a stage that baffles all attempts to express it.

The Master now turned the subject to something of great importance. He started talking about the need for sādhanā: 'What is the use of merely listening to words? Do something!' It appears from the questions of Shyam Basu that he did not have any genuine desire to learn. He was just asking for the sake of debate and argument and also to look important before others. So the Master said: 'What will you achieve by merely repeating the word "siddhi"? Will that intoxicate you? You will not be intoxicated even if you make a paste of siddhi and rub it all over your body. You must eat some of it.' He said on another occasion, 'You haven't moved along the path at all, while you say, "Make me understand, make me see that!"' Trying to prove how rational they are, most people say, 'Show us, and then only will we believe.' Well, whether they believe or not is of no consequence. And why should those who are proceeding on the path have to show them? If they truly want to know, let them try for themselves. The scriptures say that one who tries will be shown the right path by those who know.

The Master said: 'Therefore I say, practise a little spiritual discipline; then you will know all these—the gross, the subtle, the causal, and the Great Cause. While praying to God, ask only for love for His Lotus Feet.' Elsewhere he said: 'You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Eat them and be contented.' Truly, the experience of that bliss fulfils one to the

brim. So long as one does not realize the Truth, one goes on calculating and gathering information.

The Master spoke about Ahalyā. She prayed to Sri Rāmachandra, 'O Rāma, if You deign to grant me a boon, then please fulfil my desire that I may always meditate on Your Lotus Feet, even though I may be born in a pig's body.' The Master said further in this regard, 'I prayed to the Divine Mother only for love.' When one becomes desireless one attains love for God. This is how he taught us to pray.

Dualities

Speaking about righteousness and unrighteousness, the Master said: 'Dharma means good action, like giving in charity. If you accept dharma, you have to accept adharma too.' Good and evil, dharma and adharma, holiness and unholiness—all these are contradictory to each other. When we think of one we also think of its opposite. That is why it is said that we can realize the truth only after we give up all these. As the Master said earlier, both the thorn of knowledge and the thorn of ignorance stand in the way of realizing God. One realizes God only after giving up both.

Regarding purity and impurity, he said: 'Blessed is the man who retains his love for the Lotus Feet of God, even though he eats pork. But if a man is attached to the world, even though he lives only on boiled vegetables and cereals, then—' Before the Master could finish what he was saying, Dr. Sarkar said: 'He is a wretch.'

Dr. Sarkar next then gave a humorous interpretation of Buddha's nirvāna to lighten the rather serious atmosphere. Sometimes the Master also used to do this.

Shyam Basu was a householder. He wondered if the householder's life would stand in the way of God-realization. This question often comes to our mind. The Master said: 'There is no harm in leading the life of a householder. But do your duties in an unselfish spirit, fixing your mind on the Lotus Feet of God.'

He gave the example of an abscess on the body to explain how the mind has to be fixed on God. A person has an abscess on his back. He does his work all right, but his mind is always on the painful abscess. In the same way, the mind should always be directed Godward so that while one does one's duties, the thought of God will often arise in the mind. An undercurrent will always flow so that God is never forgotten. People around will hardly understand, seeing how one works. All work goes on smoothly, but the mind rests on God. Even though it amounts to dividing the mind, nonetheless this must be done in the initial stages. When, at a later stage, the mind gets totally absorbed in God, then, perhaps, no further work may be possible. But that is a far distant stage. So for those who wonder how to attend to their household duties while thinking of God, the Master said that one should do all work keeping the mind on Him. Here he gave the example of an abscess, but he also gave the examples of a toothache, or of an immoral girl. The examples are so commonplace that most people easily understand.

The Master's Views on Theosophy

Shyam Basu asked some more questions on Theosophy. It is clear that he was only raising irrelevant questions. Without being annoyed, however, the Master answered the questions. He had not learned by reading books. He had not learned by hearing commentaries on the scriptures either. Theosophy is not mentioned in the scriptures. It is a new movement. He knew nothing about it. The Master only said this much: '... those who go about making disciples belong to a very inferior level.' Those who try to increase their membership by converting others, also belong to an inferior level.

Supernatural powers do not help on the journey Godward. Rather, they are obstacles. 'It is very hard for such people to have love for God.' The mental energy of such persons is wasted in that direction. That is why they do not

develop love for God. They remain occupied in irrelevant discussions and thoughts and they hardly find time to think about God.

Swamiji once discovered that he could hear people talking at distant places while meditating. He enquired and found that the conversations from those places he had heard sitting in meditation actually tallied with facts. The Master then advised him not to meditate for some time lest his mind be distracted. The Master reasoned thus: 'Will this help to realize God? Can we make any progress on our Godward journey? Will it help us in understanding His real nature? If not, what is its value?'

Shyam Basu said once again: 'You can learn from Theosophy where the soul goes after death.' The Master replied: 'That may be. But let me tell you my own attitude. Once a man asked Hanumān, "What day of the lunar fortnight is it?" Hanumān replied: "I know nothing about the day of the week, the day of the lunar fortnight, the position of the stars in the sky, or any such things. On Rāma alone I meditate."' That is also Sri Ramakrishna's attitude. He does not know anything other than God. What is the necessity to know so many things? If by knowing Him the mind is filled up to the brim, one does not feel inclined to know anything else.

When we discuss religion we want to know many things. But the purpose of life is nothing else than to know Him. It is said in one of the Upanishads: 'Know that Self alone which is one without a second, and give up all other talks. This is the bridge leading to immortality.'² Know Him, leaving all other thoughts. Does knowing such things as where the stellar sphere is, or can one reach there or not, help us realize God? Do the various supernatural powers and mystic revelations, real or unreal, true or fake, help us in attaining the goal of our life? If we reason in this way we can understand that these things have no bearing on religion. Religion means to know Him, to enjoy His bliss. Supernatural powers become obstacles on our way to God. It was repeatedly pointed out by the Master in *The Gospel* that such powers are greatly harmful to the sādhakas.

The Lord says to Arjuna that if anyone has even one of these supernatural powers he fails to attain God. Perhaps these mystic powers and divine gifts may indicate some development of a sādhanā, but they are by no means parameters for judging his spiritual progress. Rather, they are signs of degradation.

In this regard the Master told a number of stories. Once a devotee asked another, 'Have you gained anything through years of sādhanā?' The second devotee replied: 'I carry on. By His grace things will happen in time.' But the first one was insistent: 'Oh, come on. Haven't you gained anything concrete?' The devotee admitted, 'No, but have you?' He said, 'Yes, I have. Look.' So saying he commanded an elephant passing by: 'Die.' Instantly the elephant dropped down dead. He again commanded: 'Elephant, live again.' At once the elephant came back to life. The other devotee was stunned into silence for a while. Then he said: 'Well, what have I seen other than an elephant dies and comes back to life again! But will you please tell me what you have gained by this?'

We may recall yet another story [details related elsewhere] of an aspirant who acquired the supernatural power to walk on water. The Master said that this was the test! If someone goes to the stellar sphere or the lunar sphere or Indraloka, what does that matter to the seeker? Being blessed with a human body through which God-realization is possible one should not be distracted from one's goal. All these powers keep our mind away from the path of spiritual development.

The Master would caution a devotee if he chanced to observe him display such supernatural powers. Out of his extraordinary grace he would also absorb into himself such powers in some cases so that the aspirants could progress on their path of spiritual discipline. The Master told the devotees about the supernatural powers of Chandra and Girija who used to visit him. Girija could produce a long stream of effulgent light from his back.

Once the Master, while returning to Dakshineswar from Shambhu Mullick's house, was unable to see the path because

of pitch darkness. Girija, who was with him, asked him to wait, and he produced a light from his back. The Master could then make his way. He later said: 'The whole of the road up to the gate of the Kāli temple was very clearly seen in that bright light, and I had light all the way I went.'

But did that help Girija? In fact, that very power became responsible for his downfall. Condemning all these things in very strong terms, Sri Ramakrishna said to his disciples: 'Do you know what these things are like? These are like the excreta of prostitutes!' He cautioned them time and again, 'Beware of these despicable things.'

Replying to the question whether he believed in the existence of mahātmās, the Master said: 'If you believe in my words, I say yes. But now please leave these matters alone. Come here again when I am a little better. Some way will be found for you to attain peace of mind, if you have faith in me.' It was as if the Master were saying: 'What is it that you really want—peace or prosperity? If you desire wealth, then please go elsewhere.' The idea is: 'I am unable to cure my own disease, so what can I give you? If you want peace, some way will be found.' Again he added: 'You must have noticed that I don't accept any gift of money or clothes. We do not take any collection here. That is why so many people come here.' He was assuring Shyam Basu that he would not be required to pay anything.

The Master was more intimate with Dr. Sarkar, so he said to him: 'If you won't take any offence, I shall tell you something. It is this: You have had enough of such things as money, honour, lecturing, and so on. Now for a few days direct your mind to God. And come here now and then. Your spiritual feelings will be kindled by hearing words about God.'

This truly is the essential thing: The company of holy saints and discussions about God, and that too coming from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna, who knew nothing other than God! Truly, we remain so absorbed in trifling things of the world that we do not have any leisure to think about God. If by

chance we come in contact with a person who does not know anything other than God, he draws us irresistibly like a big magnet. And if there is an element of desire in our mind to know God, he increases it a hundredfold. His influence brings about a complete change in our life.

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1. *Divyam dadāmi te chakshuh paśya me yogamaiśvaram.*
— *Gītā*, 11.8

2. *Tamevaikam jānatha ātmānam anyā vācho
vimunchathāmritasyaisha setuh.*
— *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.5

CHAPTER 61

The Gospel (October 27, 1885)

Sri Ramakrishna as a Guru and Avatāra

Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar held Sri Ramakrishna in high esteem. However, he was unable to completely give up his deep-rooted tendencies. That is why he thought that the Master should treat others with the dignity a human being deserves, and he felt that it was unbecoming of the Master to place his foot on others while he was in an ecstatic state. The Master said: 'Do you think I know at that time that I am touching another with my foot?... How can I explain to you what I experience in samādhi? After coming down from that state I think, sometimes, that my illness may be due to samādhi.... All this is the result of my divine madness. How can I help it?' Hearing this, the doctor said: 'Now he accepts my view. He expresses regret for what he does. He is conscious that the act is sinful.'

Girish and Narendranath explained to him that Sri Ramakrishna did not regret it thinking it to be improper. It was because his body (which was an instrument) had developed numerous ailments by taking the sins of others upon himself. However, though he may be sorry that he is ill, he had no regrets about touching people either with his foot or otherwise, for their own good. He acted as an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother. He never had any feeling of doership, or of being a guru.

This point is to be specially understood with regard to Sri Ramakrishna. He very often said, 'Indeed, there are three

words that prick my flesh: "guru", "master", and "father". He never accepted the position of a guru. He would say that 'Satchidānanda alone is the guru.' But who else was a greater guru than he? He did his utmost to wipe out the ignorance and sorrows of everyone, and he did his best to help everyone cross the ocean of this world. He did it till the last moment of his life without showing the least hesitation. But though he did so much, he never had the least thought that he did anything at all. He acted as an instrument of the Divine Mother. This needs to be thought over. The two qualities—humility and the attitude of a teacher—so wonderfully coexisted in him that ordinary people were confused.

This aspect has been dealt with at length in *The Great Master*. When the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna depicted him as the 'World-teacher' (Jagadguru), it gave rise to much criticism. Many thought that depicting one who had been 'humility personified' as a Jagadguru was perhaps a case of overzealous devotion on the part of his disciples. But in reality, his extreme humility was as much true as his occasional manifestations before the devotees as a Jagadguru. It has been explained in *The Great Master* how both these moods can reside in one person.

As a Jagadguru he said: 'May you be spiritually awakened! What do you want?' It is significant because here he spoke not as an individual, but as God ready to grant whatever one might ask for. In the *Devī Sukta*, Vāk, the daughter of rishi Ambhrina said: 'I am the supreme Controller of the universe and I grant whatever one may desire...' ¹ When she says this she is no longer the daughter of a sage. She is the Supreme Controller (Jagadīśvari). The same thing is also said about the sage Vāmadeva in the scriptures. He said: 'I have become Manu. I have become Surya.' (*Aham manurabhavam suryaścha*) Who is this 'I'? It is certainly not the sage Vāmadeva, because long before he was born the sun, the moon, the stars, and Manu had appeared. Therefore, the idea behind Vāmadeva's statement is this: I am not limited to this human body; I am that God who is manifested as the individual soul in all beings.

In the same way, when the Master behaved as the humblest of beings he was in his Sri Ramakrishna form. Again, when he said: 'May you be spiritually awakened! What do you want?' He said so as God, and he was ready to grant whatever one might ask for. It was only those who were fortunate enough to meet that extraordinary personality who were convinced that both states could coexist in a single person. It is like the Lord saying to Arjuna in the *Gītā*: 'O Arjuna, many lives of Mine have passed, and so have yours.'² The Lord has to take many births in many forms for the good of living beings. But His appearances have limitations. They are not His eternal form. They are born and they die. But behind these temporal forms exists His eternal form. Sometimes he speaks identifying himself with the eternal form, while at other times he speaks identifying himself with his temporal form.

The Doctrine of Divine Incarnation

God manifests Himself in every age for the good of the world. The Master also said: 'There is no liberation for an Avatāra. He had to come again and again, and will have to come in the future also. There is no end to it.' This is why Sri Krishna says, 'Many lives of Mine have passed.' It is not that He appeared only ten times in ten Incarnations. He says that there have been many times. 'Whenever there is a decline of virtue and an increase of vice, then I manifest Myself.'³

We have to understand also that God does not take birth impelled by actions of previous births, or driven by numerous desires, like ordinary human beings. In the *Gītā* the Lord says to Arjuna: 'He who thus knows truly the divine birth and actions of Mine...'⁴ The uniqueness of divine birth and actions is that they are not brought about induced by desires like that of an ordinary jīva who is bound by illusion. Being free from all desires, He takes birth as the Lord of māyā for the benefit of human beings. If the welfare of humanity is considered a desire, well, He has accepted that as a support for His

appearance. Otherwise, there is no justification for His assuming a gross form. His assuming a gross form is not the result of previous actions, because in the midst of all activities He is aloof. The Lord says the same thing to Arjuna: 'I do everything, yet I do not do anything.' In the ordinary sense He does everything. But actions do not taint Him because He is not bound by the sense of doership. Thus, both His births and His actions are divine. Ordinary mortals like us fail to realize this. The Lord says, 'Not knowing My supreme nature as the Lord of all beings, foolish people disregard Me who have taken a human body.'⁵

If we fail to understand this unique feature of the Divine Incarnation, we cannot understand an Avatāra. The scriptures have tried to explain this idea to us in several ways, but we fail to comprehend it due to our lack of understanding. We take Him to be an ordinary human being like us. Particularly when all features of a human being, like birth, enduring sorrows and suffering, and death, are manifest in Him, how can we imagine that he is the Lord of all beings, the supreme Controller?

This is true of all Avatāras. Both the above aspects (the divine and the human) of an Avatāra are natural to Him. They are neither imaginary nor feigned. Sometimes he behaves Godlike and sometimes as an ordinary jīva. Having entered the house called a body, one has to endure suffering. 'Entrapped in a body made up of five elements even Brahman weeps.' He behaves like an ordinary jīva. When an Incarnation assumes a human body he behaves as a human being. Owing to our over-enthusiastic devotion, we feel that all his human behaviour is feigned or affected. An Avatāra never indulges in any untruth. What ordinary human beings experience perforce, bound by actions and guided by ignorance, God also experiences out of His own volition for the welfare of human beings. It is very difficult for common people to understand this aspect of the Master.

Was it mere pretence when Sri Rāmachandra wept for Sītā? Was it merely a show? Had it been so, we would not have

been drawn to the character of Sri Rāmachandra. He would not be regarded as the 'best among men' (Purushottama). All his actions were genuine. Sometimes he wept, deluded by māyā. At other times he was prepared to grant boons to anybody as the greatest King. When both these attitudes exist together in a person we call him Avatāra.

It is hard for us to understand this. That is why the Master used to say that it was very difficult to believe in God's sport in a human form. It is incomprehensible to us that God can reside in a frail human structure. We imagine God to be something extraordinary. So how can we regard a person who lives and walks about like us as God? According to the Master, God's best manifestation is when he sports as a human being. Ordinary human beings are deluded seeing His sport in a human form and cannot conceive of Him as the great Controller of all beings (Bhutamaheśvara). Only at the highest stage of sādhanā can one understand this. He who is Bhutamaheśvara, beyond all limitations, sports within the limitations of the finite world. Only spiritual aspirants can understand how difficult it is to conceive of the infinite within the finite. Can a finite container hold the water of the infinite sea? It is beyond all imagination that He who pervades all the worlds and beyond, can manifest Himself within a tiny human form.

Sri Ramakrishna's illustration of 'Bach-play' (a game with country boats in which players can move about freely) is wonderful. As in 'Bach-play', an Avatāra can easily move about in the finite and infinite realms as he wishes. It is like the king's son freely moving past the seven gates of the royal palace. Only He who can move about thus, without any fetters, from the finite world to the infinite can understand this. While trying to understand the doctrine of Divine Incarnation this phenomena should receive our special attention.

As God can easily move about alternating between these two states, in the same way, when a sādhanika can freely move back and forth from the finite world to the infinite, then only

can he understand an Avatāra. Therefore, it is only natural that Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar could not recognize Sri Ramakrishna's divinity but he was fascinated observing his unique qualities. He was apprehensive that by worshipping this great man as God the devotees would turn his head. He said: 'Whatever you do, please do not worship him as God. You are turning the head of this good man.' Who would not be charmed by Sri Ramakrishna's absorption in God and his childlike purity and simplicity? And so Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar was charmed. He therefore told the devotees not to spoil this wonderful child of God by making a God of him. It is true that Dr. Sarkar was sincere in his apprehensions; but as he did not have any spiritual realization, he saw the Master's qualities only within the context of this finite world.

The Views of Swamiji and Girish

Swamiji explained: 'We think of him [meaning the Master] as a person who is like God.... There is a stage between the human-world and the divine-world where it is extremely hard to say whether a person is a man or God.' When Swamiji said this, perhaps, he still had doubts. We know that he had doubts. A few days before the Master's passing away, he said to Swamiji, 'He who was Rāma and he who was Krishna is now Ramakrishna—but not in your Vedāntic sense.' This was the Master's message to Swamiji in his last hour to set at rest his doubts.

Here Swamiji was trying to explain giving an example from science that, just as there is a point between the vegetable world and the animal world, there is a stage in between man and God.

Later, Swamiji went further and said: 'Bhagavān Sri Ramakrishna can create millions of Vivekanandas out of a handful of dust. Such power does not belong to man.' We can hardly imagine the greatness of one Vivekananda, not to speak of Him who can create millions of Vivekanandas out of a

handful of dust. Swamiji's statement is not simply an emotional outburst of an ardent devotee of the guru, but it came from his deep realization of Sri Ramakrishna's divine powers.

Girish Ghosh realized the same out of sheer devotion. He said, 'Oh, how else shall I regard a person who has taken me across the ocean of this world, and what is still more, the ocean of doubt?' Thus he expressed the feeling he had acquired through faith and devotion. He did not reason about it. He said: 'The Master is God Himself. Out of His compassion for us He has appeared assuming a finite form. He frees us from the shackles of bondage. If such a person is not called an Avatāra, whom else shall we call so?' This was his attitude. We are not competent to know how the infinite appears within the finite. And even if we have such competence it would be foolish to try and describe it. That is why it is said, 'God's inscrutable power of māyā is capable of making the impossible possible!'

Āchārya Śankara and Avatāra

The most orthodox Advaitin, Śankarāchārya, says in his commentary on the *Gītā*, 'Out of His compassion for people God appears before them as if He is born and has assumed a human form.' He is gracious, so we are able to see Him. In the *Bhāgavata* it is said: 'Aja has taken birth.' Aja means one who is birthless. God becomes gracious and takes birth in order to show us how to experience His divine bliss.

We may experience His grace, but it is beyond our intelligence to know how He was born. It is said in the scriptures: 'Do not try to understand by reasoning that which is beyond reasoning and argument.' Reason will withdraw since there is no scope of its application. If we try to bring the Principle which is beyond the mind and intellect within the grasp of our intellect, we will only meet with failure. 'The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor mind.'⁶ But even though we

may not be able to grasp It with the intellect, we may form an idea about It if we have sufficient faith and devotion. If one is blessed with the fathomless faith of Girish, the force of that faith enables one to realize the truth. Faith makes a person free from all doubts, and that itself is called knowledge. In knowledge there is no scope for any doubt. That is why the Master greatly praised Girish's faith. The Upanishads say that one should have faith. The Lord says in the *Gītā*: 'The man who has faith attains knowledge.'⁷

Worship of an Avatāra

Swamiji said: 'We offer worship to him bordering on divine worship.' This statement clarifies how we worship God. From the ordinary point of view, if someone possesses beneficent qualities we consider him worthy of worship. And if we increase these qualities infinitely and attribute them to someone, we consider him to be God. Perhaps, by multiplying the qualities we perceive infinitely, we may have some idea about God. There seems to be no other way. Swamiji says that we worship Sri Ramakrishna as a human being but that his humanness is nearer to God—that is, only through him can we imagine God, and by no other means. This is a conclusion which is accepted by all. The highest state of human excellence, when human qualities transcend all limitations, is what we call 'God'. That 'God' cannot be compared to an ordinary human being. It is the consummation of human excellence.

Swamiji has said in another place that if a cow were to think of God, it would think of Him as a huge cow. It is not possible for a cow to have a higher conception since all else is beyond its range of understanding. Besides, what would be the basis of its conception? 'Worship God by becoming God.' What does this mean? By meditating on the divine we manifest the divinity within us. The more the divinity is manifested in us, the more the ideal will appear clearly before us. Thus, when we evolve into the ideal, we attain the goal.

Śankarāchārya explains that the consummation of worship is attained when the worshipper attains the nature of the worshipped. Then a person is elevated to the state of divinity. One becomes God by worshipping God. The covering of humanness is removed and we become what we originally were—that is, we become God. The jīva becomes Śiva—it attains its real nature.

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— *Devīsukta*, 3
2. *Bahuni me vyatītāni janmāni tava chārjuna.*
— *Gītā*, 4.5
3. *Yadā Yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati Bhārata,*
Abhyuthānamadharmaḥ tadātmānam srijāmyaham.
— *Gītā*, 4.7
4. *Janma karma cha me divyam evam yo vetti tatvataḥ.*
— *Gītā*, 4.9
5. *Avajānanti mām mudhā mānushīm tanumāśritam.*
— *Gītā*, 9.11
6. *Na tatra chakshurgacchati na vāggacchati no manah.*
— *Kena Upanishad*, 1.3
7. *Śraddhāvān labhate jñānam...*
— *Gītā*, 4.39

CHAPTER 62

The Gospel (May 9, 1887)

At the Baranagore Monastery

A scene at the Baranagore monastery is presented by M. at the end of the first part of the *Kathāmrita* (the *Gospel* in the original Bengali, in five parts). It is an Appendix to the account of the Master's activities and teachings. M. describes the Baranagore monastery during its early days when the disciples of the Master were completely imbued with the thoughts and ideals of their Master. The Master was no longer in his gross form. Nonetheless, his ideals shone brightly in each of the disciples. As in earlier days, discussions about renunciation and other spiritual topics continued along with intense spiritual practices.

The Baranagore monastery was established about a year after the Master had passed away. Soon after the departure of the Master, his disciples, particularly those who would later lead the monastic life, dispersed, feeling forlorn and helpless. But Narendranath brought them together again. He founded the Baranagore Math and became the driving force behind the formation of the Order to uphold the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna. One day, Surendranath Mitra, who used to pay the rent of the Cossipore garden house, said: 'Brother, find a place where the Master's picture and ashes and the objects of his daily use can be kept and worshipped regularly, and where all-renouncing devotees like you can live together in amity. We shall go there at times to get spiritual solace. I shall pay the

rent as before.' During those days, Baranagore was not as populous as it is now. There was an extremely dilapidated house in one section, surrounded by jungle. It was said to be haunted and nobody dared go near it even during the daytime for fear of ghosts. There were also snakes. Thus, it was secured at a monthly rent of only rupees ten. The place was very much liked by the boys. Because of its proximity to Calcutta it was easily accessible to the devotees, and it was also quiet and desolate. Devotees afflicted by worldly sufferings could find a peaceful place to retire. That was why the house was rented. M. narrated the scene of one of the days (May 9, 1887) at the monastery.

Here we get the story of a devotee named Rabindra (his original name is withheld). Attracted by the world, Rabindra passed through many vicissitudes in life and had very bitter experiences even at such a young age. Now he remembered the Master. Earlier he had come in contact with the Master, though not close enough. The Master had told him: 'You will have to wait for sometime; you have to go through a few more experiences.' We do not know why he said this. But we should remember what he said. When a person has a strong desire for sense enjoyment, then try as he may, he cannot direct the mind Godward. After having enjoyed for a while, when the mind becomes calm, then one can direct it towards God, at least partially. If anyone with such a state of mind approached him, the Master used to say that he must 'play' for a while. That is, he would not teach that person renunciation right at the beginning. He knew that instructions on renunciation then would have no effect. Rather, such advice would fall flat. Therefore, he first advised such people to enjoy life, and then at the opportune moment he asked them to direct the mind towards God. That is why he told Rabindra, 'You will have to wait for sometime.' Different teachings suit different people.

It is needless to say that the Master did not look at the present alone; he could also see a person's past and future. We judge someone only on the basis of the present, but for those

who see the past, present, and future, the present is merely a small chapter. Reading a book does not mean going through a couple of pages somewhere in the middle. It is also necessary to know what is at the beginning and at the end. In the same way, those who are far-sighted will look before and after as well. The chroniclers of our ancient scriptures also advised this. The Karma-kānda (ritualistic portion) of the Vedas contain injunctions on various kinds of sacrifices. Among the scriptures, the Vedas are considered to be the most authoritative, but we often wonder why they contain descriptions of so many desire-oriented sacrifices and rituals. Instead of teaching about renunciation or the attainment of God-realization, they advise us how to acquire wealth, ensure a long life, and beget offspring. What is more, they also tell us how to destroy an enemy. How do these find a place in the Vedas? The answer is, the human mind is full of these desires. When the urge for sense enjoyment is strong in the human mind, some instructions conducive to the gratification of sense enjoyment are necessary first, before it can be directed towards God. Therefore, before giving instructions to an aspirant, his stage of development is to be seen so that he may be taught accordingly. The scriptures show the means for eliminating the intense desire for pleasures. There is no other way to guide a mind seized with the desire for sense enjoyment other than through the path of some enjoyment. Hence, there is the provision for sense enjoyment. This path reached its consummation in the Tantra. In the Tantra, elaborate provisions for sense enjoyments have been made. The Tāntric scriptures teach: 'There's nothing wrong in eating meat, drinking liquor, or enjoying sensual pleasures. These are natural tendencies of beings. But abstinence is greatly rewarding.' These activities are part of human nature, and one cannot go against one's nature. But abstinence is greatly rewarding. While moving towards God, it is necessary to slowly direct the tendencies away from their present concern. This is the Master's teaching, and the scriptures also recommend it.

Having undergone suffering, Rabindra developed a spirit of renunciation. It is mentioned that once he had spent three nights with the Master at Dakshineshwar, but the desire for sense enjoyment made him forget the Master. Now in his suffering he remembered the Master. He went to the Math to reform himself, his mind filled with an intense spirit of renunciation. This has all been recorded here. When Rabindra reached the Math, Narendra and the other monastic disciples did not reject him as despicable. Instead they welcomed him. Not only that, all of them keenly wanted that spiritual consciousness be awakened in him and his sense of renunciation should become firm. Narendranath's large heart was sympathetic towards one and all equally. His magnanimity was first seen at this monastery. Later, it was seen that he was earnestly praying even for prostitutes.

Once, during a birthday anniversary celebration of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineshwar, a few people complained that the festival was being spoiled by the presence of some prostitutes and they should not be allowed to come. Hearing this, Swamiji was very much distressed and said: 'Did our Master appear only for a handful of knowledgeable, talented, pious saints? He came for all. Those who are depraved and despised have nowhere to go, and for them his door will always be open. We want all of them to come here and gain a new life.' Swamiji's magnanimous attitude was in evidence now, seeing Rabindra.

M.'s tender heart also was softened at Rabindra's appearance. He personally took him to the Ganges for bathing, showed him the corpses at the cremation ground, and told him things that would arouse a sense of renunciation in his heart. Rabindra, no doubt, had come, but his mind was restless, and he was unable to concentrate.

We can very well visualize the scene at the Baranagore Math. Narendranath was singing: 'Drinking the bliss of Hari from the cup of prema, O Sādhu, be intoxicated!...' M. was thinking that the song was for Rabindra's benefit. The song

ends thus: In the navel [of the musk-deer] lies the musk. Its fragrance sweetens the air all around, but the musk-deer does not know from where the fragrance comes. Intoxicated, it runs this way and that in search of the source of the fragrance. It does not know that the source is its own navel. In the same way, a man runs around in search of joy and spends his life madly pursuing it in objects of pleasure. He does not know that the source of all joy is within his inmost being. The Soul abiding within is the source from where all joy issues forth and radiates all around. When once a person comes to know this, he goes within and becomes introspective. Like the musk-deer searching for the scent in the grass, in the absence of a guru to guide him properly, a human being tries in vain to draw pleasure from sense objects. The real guru teaches him from where the joy emanates and how to reach it. He steers the aspirant's mind in the right direction.

Is there any dearth of real gurus that people must search for pleasure in sense enjoyment? No, it is not that. Until the thirst within us for enjoyment is gratified to a certain extent, the teachings of the scriptures and enlightened souls will be of no avail, even if they are repeated hundreds of times. At Dakshineshwar Sri Ramakrishna taught people year after year to renounce lust and greed and he also demonstrated this precept in his own life. But how many persons could successfully apply it in their lives? How many of them took up the life of renunciation, following his teachings? Most of them failed. This is because as long as the mind does not develop dispassion for worldly objects, instructions on renunciation do not enter the ears, and even if they enter, they do not touch one's inmost being. There is a popular story. A washerwoman once said: 'It's getting rather late. It is time to set fire to the *bāsnā*.' That is, dry plantain leaves are burned and its resulting ash is used as alkaline material for washing. Hearing these words, a person named Lalababu began thinking that so many days of his life had already passed, but he was yet to set fire to his *vāsanās* (desires). As

soon as the idea of renunciation arose in his mind, he left home for good.

Can a single statement make one renounce the world? It is possible that Lalababu might have heard the same thing so many times on other occasions, but it did not strike his mind. Even when we hear such words of renunciation umpteen times they do not bear any fruit in our life. This is because our mind is attached to sense pleasures. Simply having aversion for life does not bring about renunciation. Renunciation is acquired only when we taste a higher kind of bliss. The Master used to say, 'He who has tasted syrup made from sugar-candy regards a drink made from treacle as a mere trifle.' So long as we do not know the bliss of divine love we continue to feel drawn towards the world. Worldly pleasure is but a minute part of divine pleasure. The Master used to say: 'A magnet attracts iron. Suppose there are two magnets, one big and the other small. Which one will attract the iron more? The big one, of course. God is the big magnet. If He attracts, then the attraction of all other things becomes weak.' Even after lifelong enjoyment of worldly pleasures, human beings feel that it would be wonderful if their life could be extended by some more years.

The same thing is narrated in the story of Yayāti in the Purānas. Yayāti was not satisfied even after enjoying pleasures his whole life. He then acquired his son Puru's youth and after enjoying for many more years he came to the conclusion: 'Desire is never satisfied by the enjoyment of its object. Like fire fed with ghee, it only flames up all the more.'¹ If the mind, absorbed in sense enjoyment, acquires more objects of enjoyment, its hankering will flare up all the more. The scriptures say, and this is also our experience, that enjoying sense pleasure is not the way to acquire renunciation.

M.'s narration continues: Narendranath read out how Chaitanya showered his love on everyone. One of the monks said: 'I say that one person cannot give love to another person.' Love is something that is realized within one's heart and

provides inspiration from within. How can one give that love to another? Narendranath said, 'But the Master gave it to me.' One who is the embodiment of love can give love to another in the same way that an object can be given to another by hand. Of course, if a person is not deserving of it, he can neither receive it nor absorb it. Ordinary people cannot experience love as something which is tangible, which can be held in one's hand, as it were, and given to another. It is only possible for an extraordinary person, specially when God incarnates in a human form, to give love this way. He can fill one's heart to the brim with love the moment he desires. Therefore, it was not impossible for Sri Chaitanya to give love, which indeed he did. As a rich man can distribute his riches, He who is the embodiment of love can also distribute love in the same way, and He does it. Narendranath was personally testifying that the Master had indeed given him love.

Presently Rabindra returned to the Math clad in his wet cloth and was given a dry geruā (ochre) cloth. Perhaps, in those days the monks did not have any other cloth. They used to have only one or two cloths. When they went out of the Math they wore white cloths but inside they wore ochre. Narendra said to M., 'Now he is going to put on the cloth of renunciation.' Geruā clothes traditionally signify renunciation. The cloth that becomes discoloured is called in the scriptures *vivarna vāsa*, or a cloth without its natural colour. A *sannyāsī* is one who wears such discoloured clothes. Later on, a monk's clothes were dyed in a colour which was not normally used by others, and it was named *kashāya vastra*. *Kashāya* means the colour that is not used by most people. Ochre is the colour of renunciation. It is made from mountain earth (*girimāti*). *Giri* means mountain. After rubbing a kind of mountainous *māti* (earth), the cloth is dyed in it.

Narendra's heart was such that sensing a spirit of renunciation in Rabindra, he immediately gave him a geruā cloth. It was not the time to judge his eligibility in this regard. Rabindra left the Math after spending a few days there.

Perhaps, he was not fortunate enough to be formally initiated into sannyāsa. But the account clearly shows that he rushed to the Math associated with the Master's name in a spirit of renunciation, battered by blows from the world. He had heard the Master's teachings but failed to assimilate them in his life. With his mind in turmoil, he remembered the Master. However impure his character might be, the sacred memory of his relationship with the Master started fructifying in his life. Narendranath felt a deep sense of compassion and sympathy seeing the turn his life had taken, so he dressed him in the clothes of renunciation with the earnest desire that the idea might be indelibly impressed on him.

REFERENCE

1. *Na jatu kāmah kāmānāmupabhogena śāmyati,
Havishā krishnavartmeva bhūya evābhivardhate.*
— *Bhāgavata*, 9.19.14.

CHAPTER 63

The Gospel (Appendix B)

The Master and Ashwinikumar

A letter written by Ashwinikumar Dutta to M. was put as an appendix to the *Kathāmrita*. Ashwinikumar met the Master only for a few days and could not become very intimate with him. He was a thinker and a good writer. Wonderful indeed is the captivating style of these reminiscences of the Master recorded in this letter. It is remarkable how successful he was in drawing a picture of the aspect of the Master that he had personally witnessed.

It is not that those who had spent a long time with the Master, or who lived close to him, were alone able to properly understand him. In this context a remark of Swami Saradanandaji is worth repeating. Once a devotee came to him and said, 'I've come here to be in the company of sādhus.' Swami Saradanandaji replied: 'Look, no remarkable change was noticed in the lives of those who used to visit the Master frequently, or in the employees of the Kālī temple, or in the neighbours who lived close to him day after day and year after year. On the other hand, a huge change occurred in the lives of those who came to the Master during the last four years of his life, or even for a very short period of time; some of them might have visited him only once a week, or lived with him, at best, for a couple of months, and that too not at a stretch. But those who lived with the Master year after year did not experience any change in their lives.' Therefore, the effect of

the saint's company does not depend on how many days a person spends near him. It is very clear that unless the recipients are ready, nothing can be retained in them. Those who sanctified their lives by coming in contact with the Master were fully qualified for it. That is why, perhaps, they could absorb his grace. But those who were not prepared could not get any benefit from their contact with the Master; at least, that is how it appears. Therefore, keeping company with saints does not mean living near them in terms of days and months. The scriptures ordain that only those who are qualified attain realization.¹ If all and sundry are taught indiscriminately, it is not only useless, but it may sometimes even yield adverse results. A good example of this is the story of Indra and Virochana in the Vedas. While discussing the Ātman, Brihaspati also talks about the transient objects. His aim is not to disturb the mind but to carry it from the gross to the subtle. He answers step by step so that the mind can reach the reality, which is the pure, attributeless Ātman.

In the scriptures this process is called Arundhatī Nyāya. One who is unable to find the star Arundhatī is asked to concentrate first on the constellation of Saptarshi [Ursa Major]. Then his attention is drawn to the third star in its tail named Vasiṣṭha. Looking intensely at Vasiṣṭha one then finds a very small and faint star, which is Arundhatī. If that person had been asked to concentrate on Arundhatī at the very beginning, he would have failed. In the same way, while teaching about the Self (Ātman) the scriptures first discuss gross principles and then move on to subtler ones.

The Ātman is of the nature of knowledge. We do not have any idea about something that is of the nature of knowledge, and it is indeed very difficult to have any idea. How do we experience Him who Himself experiences everything? 'Through what should one know the Knower?'² He is the eternal Knower and can never become an object of knowledge. Consciousness mixed up with the knowledge of different objects is what we experience. If the associated objects are

removed, then pure Consciousness remains, and that is the Ātman. This pure Consciousness is beyond our comprehension. In the Upanishads, while trying to explain the pure Ātman, Yājñavalkya said to Maitreyī that after attaining the Self, no more is there any particular consciousness (connected with the body etc.), i.e. no mental modifications remain. It is most difficult to realize this. When all attributes are negated, what remains is the Ātman. It cannot be described. As it is difficult to understand God, it is also not easy to recognize Him when He comes in a human form. So it is not necessarily true that whoever comes to him will understand him. The Master said: 'That Rāma was both Brahman Absolute and a perfect Incarnation of God in human form was known only to twelve rishis. Other sages said to Him, "Rāma, we know You only as Daśaratha's son." So how do we realize Him? The path lies in purifying the mind. Did everybody who came to the Master possess a pure mind? Of course not. Thus, those who did not, failed to understand him. Physical nearness does not necessarily mean companionship. This point can be explained by the example of sounds being transmitted by electromagnetic waves. There may be wonderful music going on, but only those radios which are tuned in properly can receive and reproduce the sound. Similarly, we can receive an impression only when our minds are prepared, and not otherwise. If our mind is not pure, we cannot gain anything from holy company. For the same reason, even if we associate with an Avatāra we fail to recognize him. It is said in the *Bhāgavata*: When the reflection of the moon falls on water, the fish play with it considering the reflected moon to be one of them. They do not know that it is the celestial moon. In the same way, when an Avatāra appears in our midst we regard him as an ordinary human being.

Then what is the difference between those who love him and those who bear malice towards him? Those who bear malice towards him will keep away from him of their own accord. Those who love him as their own, however, become

pure because the object of their love is the very embodiment of purity. Though they may not understand him, or though they may not realize who he is, still they become blessed. We have discussed earlier that it is said in the *Bhāgavata* the gopīs did not consider Sri Krishna as God, but took him to be their paramour. Even though they loved God as their beloved, and not as the Supreme Reality, they attained liberation. The credit for becoming thus blessed is due not so much to them as to the object of their love, which was God Himself.

Does this imply that whoever came in contact with the Master automatically derived benefit? Yes. Those who loved him and considered him as their own, regardless of whether they realized his real nature or not, were benefited owing to the intrinsic quality of the loved object. The Purāṇas go one step further. They say that those who bear malice towards Him will also be benefited. Śiśupāla and others like him were sworn enemies of Sri Krishna. Owing to their hostility, their minds were always engaged in thinking of Him, and they saw Him everywhere. Thus the continuous remembrance of God made their lives blessed. This may seem to be an exaggeration, but it has been put in this way only to make us aware of the greatness of God. Otherwise, everything we see around us—bricks, logs, straw, cows, human beings etc.—are not all these Brahman? The scriptures say that everything is Brahman. So naturally we are seeing Brahman, and thus the fruits of Self-realization should automatically come to us. Why does it not happen then? It is because we do not see things as Brahman, but as objects of the world covered by māyā. The scriptures say that one attains the supreme good when one realizes the true nature of things. Scriptures on devotion, however, do not go into such details. They say that if we are able to concentrate our mind on God in whichever way possible, our mind becomes pure and holy, taking on the nature of the loved object. This pure mind then becomes capable of seeing the supreme Self.

Here we find that Ashwinikumar came in contact with the Master for only four or five days. But the memories of

those days made such an impact on his mind that they were treasured for his whole life. He came with a mind developed in such a way that the Master's divine life was deeply engraved on it. Even though his association was not for a long period he was immensely benefited. Āchārya Śankara said, 'Even a moment's association with saints will become a ferry for one to cross the ocean of the world.'³ However, one should have such association at the right time. Unless the saint is recognized as a saint, no benefit will accrue from that meeting. The temple employees of Dakshineshwar lived near the Master for so long, but their lives were not at all changed. His divine influence had no effect on them.

Brahman is everywhere, but we do not realize this, and this is called māyā. Illusion vitiates our sight so God remains beyond our vision even though He is everywhere. He cannot be covered, but our vision can be covered. The clouds cannot cover the sun but they can block our vision. But we think that the clouds have covered the sun.

An Avatāra is called māyāmanushya when he comes in a human form. Covering Himself with His māyā, He appears as a human being but is not truly so. That is why it is said that He has taken birth. He covers the sight of all with His power of māyā, and this is how he covers His real nature. By casting a spell of māyā (illusion) all over the world, He Himself remains hidden.

In order to overcome this māyā, we have to seek the Lord of māyā. The Lord says, '...Those who take refuge in Me alone cross over this Māyā.'⁴ He reveals His true form to a person who surrenders to Him by granting that person a divine eye. He granted such a divine eye to Arjuna, saying, 'I grant you the celestial eye; behold my divine yoga.'⁵ Then Arjuna saw Him in His supreme divine glory. The Lord can also be seen free from all His glory and bereft of all qualities and attributes. But this is a far distant affair!

An Avatāra remains beyond our comprehension even though he takes birth among us. Those who came in contact

with the Master in the ordinary course of activities, took him to be an ordinary person. So they did not derive any benefit from the company of an Incarnation. Whereas those who could recognize him and who surrendered themselves at his feet, were greatly blessed. M. is one example.

Reminiscences of M.

A short and useful biographical note on the chronicler of the book, has been given at the end of the first part of the *Kathāmrita* by its publishers. In the English *Gospel*, a very brief note is given on page 50 in the 'Introduction'. A reader naturally feels curious to know about the chronicler, who took upon himself the task of spreading the nectar like words of the Master. Though the introduction of Mahendranath Gupta, whose pen name was M., is brief, some of his life has been given along with the teachings of the *Gospel*, making it very interesting. Those who knew M. personally could appreciate it even more. His entire life was filled with Sri Ramakrishna through and through.

We also saw that M. did not talk about anything other than Sri Ramakrishna. Many topics used to be raised before him, because he was highly learned. However, even if someone raised other topics, he would inevitably steer the discussion towards the Master. One day a discussion was going on about the Master when someone requested him to speak about the Upanishads. M. laughed and said: 'We are indeed discussing the Upanishads. To talk about the Master is nothing but talking about the Upanishads.' Then he quoted from an Upanishad: '[Disciple]: "O teacher, please tell me the teachings of the Upanishad." [Teacher]: "The message of the Upanishad has already been given to you. I have told you about the Upanishad, indeed, that concerns Brahman."'6 The word Upanishad itself means profound and deep philosophy. The message we get from the Master's life is a deep, profound, spiritual philosophy. M.'s way of describing things was

wonderful and would overwhelm the listeners. We can understand this when we read the *Gospel*. The Master's teachings have been placed there as they are; there is no tendency in M. to show off his own scholarship.

We saw M. at different places. At first he used to live in a small portion of a school building. Later he moved to the third floor of the Morton School building. Thereafter he lived at his ancestral house, which is now called Kathāmrita Bhavan. Whenever and wherever we met him, we did not hear about anything from him other than the Master. He followed this dictum in spirit and in letter, as it were: 'Do not speak of anything else. Do not think of any other thing.'

M. could make us feel that we were his own from the first meeting. He used to enquire about the monks we met at the Math (Belur Math) when we went there, what we normally saw, etc., in detail. He was keen to know the details of what they saw from those who had visited the Math. I was still in school then. One day I went to him with one of my friends, who also later became a monk. After some talk he asked, 'Do you know how to sing?' We looked at each other and then I said, 'We don't know how to sing properly, but we can somehow sing together.' He said: 'Then sing something.' Unfortunately, the song that came to our mind at that time was, '[O Lord] is it good to push me away by Thy feet since I am a sinner?' After hearing the song, he said: 'The Master did not like songs that had words like sin or sinner. Sing only those that are full of joy and mirth.' We sang yet another song. I cannot recollect its details, but it certainly was joyful, and he was happy to hear it. On another occasion when we went to him, he took us to the roof which overlooked the buildings all around. He pointed to some buildings, one after another, and told us that the Master had visited those houses. His relationship with Calcutta was solely with reference to its relationship with the Master. From the roof we could see the sky touching the horizon. He told us that the Master used to say that looking at the sky one's mind could get an idea of the

infinite. Thus, he would speak about many things and would treat everybody with sincere love. That was one aspect of him.

But it was different when we became monks. He would not accept our salutations. It made him feel uneasy. He used to say: 'You're sādhus. Why should you offer salutations to me?' After we became monks he never allowed us to leave without eating something. The Master had advised him to serve monks, so even though we were very young, it did not matter. After all, we were monks. He always took loving care of us.

We also observed that he had developed a sense of detachment even though he lived with his family. He never had any special relationship with any of its members. Immersed in his own world, he lived by himself in a small section attached to the school building. When he became old some of his admirers lived with him and looked after him. Even in his four-storied ancestral house he lived at first by himself in one room, but was later joined by members of his family. Though he always seemed to be in a meditative mood, he was never unmindful of others. Perhaps, the ideal for his life was to remain always engaged in godly thoughts and activities. The pages of the *Gospel* bear adequate testimony to this.

When he visited the Math, he would not talk much. The senior monks respected him. He would enter the rooms of the monks, and he would observe what they did, what books they studied, and how they led their lives. To the devotees he said: 'You people go to the Math and simply make a lot of noise. This is not how to keep company with saints and monks. When the monks engage themselves in meditation and japa very early in the morning, try to imbibe their mood by sitting with them for some time.'

Though he often visited the monks at the Math, he also like to live alone. There is a reference in the *Gospel* that the Master had once advised him to stay at the sādhan-kutir (cottage for spiritual sādhanā) at Dakshineshwar. On occasions he used to meditate along with other devotees under the Bel

tree at the Panchavati. All the places associated with the sacred memory of the Master were holy to him. He kept a lump of clay from Kāmārpukur and leaves from the trees at the Panchavati, regarding them as priceless treasures. He would see even trifling things, which would normally escape others' attention, from a devotee's view point.

M. went to North India and performed sādhanā at various pilgrim centres, sometimes alone, and at other times with devotees. It was his habit to help monks financially when they would go for sādhanā. Perhaps the amount was not big, but there was also a reason for this. A monk going for austerities (tapasyā) should be provided with just what is necessary and not what would make for an easy life. He used to give one rupee to each of the monks. Of course, in those days one rupee was not a very small amount for monks. Senior monks would receive two rupees. And he even paid three rupees to one or two monks. He would not be unusually generous just because one was the Master's devotee. Yet he was almost a miser when it came to worldly affairs. After all, he was the Master's disciple! The Master was also not very willing to spend money! However, M. did not hesitate to spend money when circumstances so warranted.

He was not only a benefactor but a teacher as well. He would inquire about the spiritual practices of individuals and would become happy to know about their progress.

REFERENCES

1. *Adhikārinamāśāste phalasiddhivisheshatah.*

— *Vivekachudāmani*, 14

2. *Yenedam sarvam vijānāti tam kena vijānīyāt. Vijnātāramare kena vijānīyāditi.*

— *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 2.4.14

3. *Kshanamiha sajjanasangatirekā*

bhavati bhavārnava tarane noukā.

— Mohamudgara, 4

4. *Māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetām taranti te.*

— Gītā, 7.14

5. *Dīvyam dadāmi te chakshuḥ paśya me yogamaīśvaram.*

— Gītā, 11.8

6. *Upanishadam bho bruhītyuktā ta upanishadbrāhmīm vāva ta
upanishadambrumeti.*

— Kena Upanishad, 4.7

GLOSSARY

āchārya: A religious teacher.

Adhyātma Rāmāyana: A spiritual interpretation of the life of Rāma; a subordinate *Rāmāyana*, interpreting the epic in terms of non-dualism and emphasizing the divine nature of Rāma and his close associates. It is part of the *Brahmānda Purāna*.

Advaita: See **non-dualism**.

agni: The element fire. See **five elements**.

ahamkāra: The part of the inner organ that functions as one's ego or I-consciousness. See **antahkarana**.

ajnāna: Ignorance, individual or cosmic, which is responsible for the non-perception of Reality.

ākāśa: The element space or ether. See **five elements**.

anāhata śabda: Music of the spheres, heard by aspirants in deep meditation.

antahkarana: The inner organ, which consists of manas (mind); buddhi (intellect); chitta (mind-stuff, or seat of memory); and ahamkāra (ego).

Aparokshānubhuti: True and direct knowledge of God, or Brahman.

Arjuna: A cousin and disciple of Sri Krishna and the great hero of the *Mahābhārata*. Sri Krishna teaches him in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

āsana: 1. Seat or mat for sitting for meditation. 2. Posture or position for sitting in meditation.

Āśrama: 1. Hermitage. 2. Any one of the four stages of life. See **four stages of life**.

Ashtāvakra Samhitā: A non-dualistic treatise of Vedānta philosophy written by the sage Ashtāvakra.

Ātman: Self or Soul; denotes also the Supreme Brahman, which is one with the individual soul, according to Advaita Vedānta.

avatāra: An Incarnation of God. An avatāra is born of free choice, not as a result of past actions; and throughout his life, he is conscious of his divine mission. An avatāra's actions are of permanent benefit to humanity. Among those widely accepted as avatāras are Rāma, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, and Ramakrishna.

avidyā-māyā: Māyā, or illusion causing duality, has two aspects: avidyā-māyā and vidyā-māyā. Avidyā-māyā, or the māyā of ignorance, consisting of anger, passion, and so on, entangles one in worldliness. Vidyā-māyā, or the māyā of knowledge, consisting of kindness, purity, unselfishness, and so on, leads one to liberation. Both belong to the relative world. *See* māyā.

Balaram Bose (1848-1890): A well-known devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.

Bauls: Lit., 'god-intoxicated devotees'. A Vaishnava sect of wandering minstrels.

Bhagavad Gītā: Lit., 'the Song of God'. One of the most important scriptures of the Hindus, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, or *Gītā*, consists of the teachings of Sri Krishna to Arjuna on how to realize God while carrying on the duties of life. The eighteen chapters of this work are part of the Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata*. It is considered the practical scripture of Vedānta, containing the essence of the Upanishads.

Bhagavān: Lit., 'One endowed with the six attributes': infinite treasures, strength, glory, splendour, knowledge, renunciation. An epithet of the godhead; also, Personal God of the devotee.

Bhāgavata: A devotional scripture illustrating religious truths through the life story of Sri Krishna and stories of seers, saints, and kings of India. It is sacred to the Vaishnavas who worship Sri Krishna. Its authorship is ascribed to the sage Vyāsa.

Bhairavi: A wandering nun or sannyasinī of a Tāntric sect.

Bhairavi Brahmani: A nun who initiated Sri Ramakrishna into Tāntric disciplines. She was the first to declare him an avatāra.

bhakta: A spiritual aspirant who follows the path of devotion.

bhakti yoga: The path of devotion.

bhāva: Existence; feeling; emotion; idea; ecstasy; samādhi. Also denotes any one of the five attitudes or modes that a dualistic worshipper assumes towards God. *See five attitudes.*

bhāva samādhi: Spiritual ecstasy in which the devotee retains his or her ego and enjoys communion with the Personal God.

bhāvamukha: Exalted state in which an aspirant keeps his or her mind on the border between the Absolute and the Relative. From this position one can contemplate the ineffable and attributeless Brahman and also participate in the activities of the relative world, seeing in it the manifestation of God alone.

Bhīshma: One of the great heroes of the war of Kurukshetra, described in the *Mahābhārata*.

Brahmā: The Creator, the first god of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Vishnu and Śiva.

brahmachārī: 1. A religious student devoted to the practice of spiritual disciplines. 2. A celibate belonging to the first stage of life. *See four stages of life.*

brahmacharya: 1. Continence in thought, word, and action. 2. Initiation into monastic life. 3. In the traditional Indian culture, the first stage of life is that of a student. *See four stages of life.*

Brahman: The Absolute; the Supreme Reality of the Vedānta philosophy. It is described as Satchidānanda, Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute. It is also described as asti (It is), bhāti (It shines), and priyam (It is blissful).

Brahmananda, Swami (Rakhal Chandra Ghosh; 1863-1922): The spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna and one of his sixteen monastic disciples. He served as the first president of the

Ramakrishna Order. In the Order, he is referred to as Maharaj. Sri Ramakrishna declared him to be one of six Īśvarakotis among his disciples.

brahmin: Highest caste in Hindu society.

Brāhmo Samāj: A nineteenth-century Indian socio-religious reform movement devoted to the formless Brahman with attributes. This movement was founded by Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) and organized by Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905); *see* **Tagore, Maharshi Devendranath**. Membership was open to all, irrespective of caste, race, or nationality. In 1857 Keshab Chandra Sen became the third leader of the movement. There was a schism in 1878 resulting in the Indian Brāhmo Samāj, led by Keshab, and the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj, led by Vijaykrishna Goswami and Shivanath Shastri.

buddhi: The intellectual function of the inner organ which makes decisions. *See antahkarana*.

causal body: The blissful sheath (ānandamaya kosha) covering the Ātman. *See gross body; subtle body; five sheaths*.

Chaitanya (1485-1533): Regarded by many as a divine incarnation, he popularized repetition of the Lord's name and the path of bhakti, or love of God. He is regarded as an incarnation of Krishna and Rādhā in one body, manifesting Rādhā's ideal transcendental love, or madhura bhāva.

Chaitanya Charitāmrita: Biography of Chaitanya written by Krishnadās Kavirāj.

Chandī: A Hindu scripture, part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, in which the Divine Mother is described as the Ultimate Reality.

chit: Pure Consciousness; the Ātman.

chitta: The mind-stuff of the inner organ. It functions as memory. *See antahkarana*.

Chosen Deity, Chosen Ideal: The aspirant's spiritual ideal; a manifestation of God.

Dakshineswar: A village, four miles north of Calcutta; the location of the Kālī temple complex, where Sri Ramakrishna lived for 30 years (1855-1885).

dāśya bhāva: Thinking of oneself as the servant of God. God is felt to be one's master. *See* **five attitudes**.

Dayananda Saraswati, Swami: A renowned pandit who founded the Ārya Samāj in the Punjab and northwest India.

Deva/devī: A god/a goddess.

dharma: Lit., 'that which holds together.' 1. Righteous conduct. 2. The inmost constitution of a thing. The dharma of a person results from past actions, and determines conduct and sense of right and wrong. Also refers to one of four traditional goals of life in Indian society.

dhōti: A long cloth worn by men to cover the body from the waist down.

dikshā: *See* **initiation**.

Divine Mother: Mother of the Universe and the Śakti (or power) of Brahman. This term refers to God, the cosmic consciousness whose power manifests Itself as the universe, pervades all sentient and insentient beings, and appears as diverse names and forms. The term Divine Mother refers to personal goddesses such as Kālī, Durgā, and others.

divya bhāva (mode): A Tāntric form of worship appropriate to a person with a divine nature. *See* **paśu bhāva; vīra bhāva**.

dualism (dvaiṭa): A spiritual attitude in which one considers God to be separate from one's self; the Relative is considered to be real. *See also* **qualified non-dualism; non-dualism**.

Durgā: One of the ten names of the Divine Mother.

Dvaita: *See* **dualism**.

five attitudes: Five ways of relating to God. Śānta bhāva, calm or serene attitude: Seeing God in every thing and in every being, one becomes calm. Dāśya bhāva, servant attitude: One thinks of God as one's master. Vātsalya bhāva, affectionate attitude: One thinks of God as one's child. Sakhya bhāva, friendly attitude: One thinks of God as one's friend. Madhura bhāva, lover's attitude: One thinks of God as one's beloved.

five elements: In order of their evolution from Brahman: ākāśa, space or ether; vāyu, air; agni, fire; ap, water;

prithivī, earth. These subtle elements combine to create the gross elements. These five elements constitute all creation. Their properties are: ākāśa, sound; vāyu, touch; agni, visibility; ap, taste; prithivī, fragrance. Each gross element contains its own property plus those of any preceding elements.

five sheaths (koshas): The five sheaths that cover the Ātman: annamayakosha, physical sheath; prānamayakosha, vital sheath; manomayakosha, mental sheath; vijñānamayakosha, intellectual sheath; and ānandamayakosha, blissful sheath.

five vital forces (prānas): prāna, apāna, vyāna, udāna, and samāna. Prāna manifests as motion, gravitation, magnetism, the vital principle that sustains physical life, thought force, and bodily action. Five modifications of prāna are concerned with bodily functions: Prāna is that vital force which goes upwards and has its seat at the tip of the nose; apāna goes downward below the navel, and has its seat in the organs of excretion; vyāna moves in all directions and pervades the body; udāna helps the subtle body to leave the gross body at the time of death, and has its seat in the throat; samāna assimilates food and drink and has its seat in the middle of the body.

four stages of life: In ancient India, life was divided into four twenty-five year periods: brahmacharya (student); gārhasthya (householder); vānaprastha (when one practises spiritual disciplines in seclusion); and sannyāsa (renunciation of the world).

gārhasthya: Traditionally, the second stage of life, during which one works, marries, raises children, and manages a household. *See four stages of life.*

Garuda: A mythical bird, the carrier of Vishnu.

Gāyatrī: A sacred Vedic mantra recited daily by Hindus of the three upper castes after they have been invested with the sacred thread; also, the presiding deity of the Gāyatrī.

ghee: Butter clarified through boiling.

Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912): Well-known dramatist and actor in Calcutta, and devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.

Gītā: Lit., 'song'. By itself, *Gītā* refers to the *Bhagavad Gītā* (the Song of God). Some other *Gītās* are the Guru *Gītā*, Gopi *Gītā*, Rāma *Gītā*, and Uddhavā *Gītā*. See *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Gopāla: The child Krishna.

Gopaler-ma (Aghoremāni Devi; c. 1822-1906): A female devotee of Sri Ramakrishna who regarded the child Krishna (Gopāla) as her living companion and as God.

Gopīs: The milkmaids of Vrindāvan, companions and devotees of Sri Krishna.

gross body: The physical sheath (*annamayakosha*) covering the Ātman. See **causal body**; **subtle body**; **five sheaths**.

gunas: Lit., 'qualities'. According to Sāṅkhya philosophy, the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—constitute *prakṛiti*, or nature. Everything in the universe, including both gross and subtle matter, is made up of the three *gunas*. When the *gunas* are in balance, no creation takes place. When they are disturbed, creation begins. In the physical world, *sattva* embodies what is pure and fine; *rajas* embodies activity; and *tamas* embodies solidity and resistance. In the human mind, *sattva* expresses itself as calmness and purity; *rajas* as activity, passion, and restlessness; *tamas* as laziness, inertia, and dullness. All beings are made up of the three *gunas*, with one predominant at various times.

guru: The spiritual teacher who initiates a disciple into spiritual practice. See **mantra**.

Hanumān: A monkey who played a key role in the *Rāmāyana*; regarded as the greatest devotee of Rāma. He is an exemplar of one having the servant attitude.

Hazra: See **Pratap Chandra Hazra**.

heroic mode: A Tāntric discipline in which the male aspirant practises *sādhana* with a female companion until he is established in the divine mood. See also **vīra bhāva**.

Holy Mother (Sri Sarada Devi; 1853-1920): Spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna; she carried on his ministry from 1886 to 1920.

Hridayram Mukherjee (1840-1899): A nephew of Sri Ramakrishna. He served Sri Ramakrishna from 1855 to 1881.

hubble-bubble: A water pipe used for smoking tobacco.

initiation (dīkshā): When a guru awakens the disciples spirituality and imparts spiritual instruction.

Ishta: One's Chosen Deity, or spiritual ideal.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891): A great pandit, social reformer, and philanthropist whom Sri Ramakrishna visited in 1882. Mahendranath Gupta was a headmaster at one of the boys' schools that he founded in Calcutta.

Īśvara: Saguna Brahman, or the Personal God; creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe.

jada: Gross matter.

Janaka: King of Mithila in ancient India; a great spiritual aspirant.

japa: The practice of repeating one's spiritual mantra, as instructed by one's guru.

jīva: The embodied soul; a living being.

jīvanmukta: Lit., 'liberated-in-life'. One who is liberated while still living in the body.

Jñāna yoga: Path of discrimination and knowledge.

jñāna-kānda: 1. Knowledge portion of the Vedas. 2. The Upanishads. 3. Vedānta. *See karma-kānda.*

jñānī: 1. A knower of Brahman. 2. One who follows the path of discrimination and knowledge.

Kabīr: A mediaeval religious reformer, mystic, and writer of songs. He lived during the last part of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

Kālī: One of the ten names of the Divine Mother.

Kaliyuga: The present age or cycle, in which people tend towards worldliness and achievement. *See yuga.*

Kamalākānta: A mystic poet of Bengal, composer of devotional songs mainly addressed to the Divine Mother.

Kāmārpukur: A village sixty miles northwest of Calcutta; the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna.

karma: 1. Action. 2. The results of past actions. It is generally divided into three groups: sanchita, āgāmi, and prārabdha. The sanchita karma is the vast store of accumulated actions done in the past, the fruits of which have not yet been reaped. The āgāmi karma is the action that will be done by the individual in the future. The prārabdha karma is the action that has begun to fructify, the fruit of which is being reaped in this life. It is a part of sanchita karma, inasmuch as this also is action done in the past. But the difference between the two is that, whereas the sanchita karma is not yet operative, the prārabdha has already begun to operate. The prārabdha is the most effective of all karmas, because its consequences cannot be avoided in any way. The realization of God enables one to abstain from future actions (āgāmi karma) and to avoid the consequences of all accumulated action (sanchita karma) that have not yet begun to operate, but the prārabdha, which has already begun to fructify, must be reaped.

karma yoga: Path of unselfish action in which one offers the results of actions to the Lord.

karma-kānda: The portion of the Vedas that describes rituals and Vedic sacrifices and the results of practising them. *See* jñāna-kānda.

kīrtan: Devotional singing by a group. When singing is in procession and accompanied by musical instruments, it is called sankīrtan.

kosha: Sheath covering the Ātman. *See* five sheaths.

Krishna: An incarnation of Vishnu or avatāra; teacher of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Liberation: Final liberation from karma and the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth through union with God or knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. It is the goal of spiritual practice. Also referred to as moksha or mukti.

līlā: 1. Divine play. 2. The relative plane; opposite of nitya, or the Eternal.

M.: *See* Mahendranath Gupta.

madhura bhāva: The attitude in which one thinks of God as one's beloved.

Mahābhārata: Famous Hindu epic consisting of 100,000 verses, including the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Composition is estimated at 5th century B.C. and is attributed to the sage Vyāsa. In 18 sections, it illustrates the truths of the Vedas through stories of King Bharata's descendants.

mahābhāva: Nineteen spiritual emotions for God combine and manifest in the aspirant as intense love of God.

Mahāmāyā: Lit., 'the Great Enchantress'.

Mahendranath Gupta (M.; 1854-1932): A householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who later recorded the *Kathāmrita*, translated as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Sri Ramakrishna sometimes referred to him as 'Master' because he was a schoolteacher.

Mahimacharan Chakravarty: A spiritual aspirant who visited Sri Ramakrishna and who had a desire for name and fame.

manas: Mind. The function of the inner organ that considers pros and cons. *See antahkarana.*

mantra: A particular name of God, corresponding to an aspirant's Chosen Deity. The mantra is transmitted to a disciple by his or her guru, during initiation. *See japa.*

Manu: The author of *Manu Smṛiti*, an ancient Indian treatise on religious law and social obligation.

Mathuranath Biswas (1817-1871): A son-in-law of Rani Rasmani. He served Sri Ramakrishna for fourteen years as his foremost supplier of provisions.

Māthura: A cycle of songs expressing pangs of separation felt by gopīs when Krishna left Vrindāvan.

māyā: 1. Ignorance or avidyā. Māyā covers Brahman and creates names and forms. It is because of māyā that the One appears as many, the Absolute as the relative. 2. Attachment. The two aspects of māyā are avidyā- māyā and vidyā- māyā.

moksha: Final liberation from the cycle of birth and death through union with God. It is the highest of the four goals of human life.

mukti: *See* Liberation.

Nārada: A great sage and lover of God in Hindu mythology.

Nārāyana: A name of Vishnu.

Narendranath Dutta: *See* Vivekananda, Swami.

Navadvīp: The birthplace of Sri Chaitanya.

Navya-Nyāya: A new school of logic created in Bengal by pandits.

neti, neti: Lit., "not this, not this." The attitude of one who follows the path of knowledge, or jñāna.

Niranjanananda, Swami (Niranjan Ghosh; 1862-1904): One of the sixteen monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He was considered by Sri Ramakrishna to be one of six Īśvarakotis among his disciples.

Nirguna: Lit., 'without qualities'. A term used to describe the Absolute.

Nirguna Brahman: Lit., 'Brahman without attributes'. A term used to describe the Absolute.

nirvāna: Lit., 'blowing out,' as of a flame. Annihilation of desire, passion, and ego. Liberation, characterized by freedom and bliss.

nirvikalpa samādhi: The highest state of samādhi, in which the aspirant's mind is completely free of thought waves and in which one is completely absorbed in nondual consciousness. In this state there is no awareness of one's body or the world; no awareness of time, space, or causation.

nitya: The Eternal; opposite of līlā.

Nityānanda: Lit., 'God, the embodiment of eternal bliss'. The main disciple of Chaitanya. Also referred to as Nitāi.

Non-dualism (advaita): Complete identification with the Godhead; only the Absolute is considered to be real. *See also* dualism and qualified non-dualism.

Nyāya: A philosophical system dealing with logic.

OM: The most sacred word of the Vedas; also written as Aum. A symbol of God, or Brahman. Also called the Nāda-Brahman, the Sound-Brahman.

Padmalochan: The chief court pandit of the Maharaja of

Burdwān. He was a Vedic pandit who met the Master in 1864.

Panchadaśī: A Vedānta treatise of fifteen sections, written by Vidyāranya Muni.

Panchavati: A grove made up of five trees: ashwatha, vilva, āmalaki, banyan, and aśoka. They are planted according to a certain arrangement.

pandit: One who is an authority on a particular scripture or ritual; a scholar.

paramahansa: Lit., 'a great soul.' 1. A monk who belongs to the highest order of sannyāsis, a term often applied to Sri Ramakrishna. 2. A monk belonging to a particular sect of the Śankara Order.

Paramātmān: The Supreme Ātman; the Supreme Self.

para-samvedya: The thoughts and experiences that a person has that manifest to others. *See* **sva-samvedya**.

paśu bhāva: A Tāntric form of worship appropriate to a person with animal or bestial nature. *See* **vīra bhāva**; **divya bhāva**.

Prahlāda: A famous devotee in the Purāṇas who remained steadfast in devotion to Vishnu, despite repeated torture and attempts on his life by his father.

Prakṛiti: Nature personified. The female principle; Purusha is the male principle. *See* **gunas**.

prakṛiti: Primordial nature. A term used in Sāṅkhya philosophy that means the same as māyā. It is the power of Brahman, used to create, preserve, and destroy.

prāṇa: Vital force; breath. *See* **five vital forces**.

prāṇāyāma: Control of the breath to aid concentration and control of one's mind.

prārabdha karma: Actions performed in the past that bear results in the present. *See* **karma**.

prasād: Food or drink that has been offered to a deity, taken by devotees afterwards to purify the mind.

Pratap Chandra Hazra (1840-1905): A devotee who lived at the Dakshineswar temple garden and whose main goal was worldly prosperity.

prema: Ecstatic, divine love of God, of the most intense kind.

Premananda, Swami: (Baburam Ghosh; 1861-1918): One of Sri Ramakrishna's sixteen monastic disciples. Sri Ramakrishna stated that Baburam was one of six Īśvarakotis among his disciples.

pujā: Worship of a god or goddess.

Purānas: Eighteen epics composed by the sage Vyāsa that elaborate and popularize religious truths by means of stories about divine incarnations, saints, kings, and devotees, both mythical and historical.

puraścharana: The practice of performing japa a certain number of times a day, then methodically increasing the amount daily, followed by a similar decrease.

Purusha: According to Sāṅkhya, the male principle; Prakṛiti is the female principle.

qualified non-dualism (viśiṣṭādvaita): The school of Vedānta that considers each being to be a part of God; both Absolute and Relative are considered real. *See also dualism; non-dualism.*

Rādhā: The chief female confidante of Krishna. She is considered the ideal of true transcendental love.

rāga bhakti: Spontaneous, supreme devotion that goes beyond all rules. *See vaidhī bhakti.*

rāja yoga: The path of concentration and meditation.

rajas: Lit., 'activity, desire.' One of the three guṇas.

Rāmachandra, or Rāma: An incarnation of Vishnu; king of Ayodhyā in ancient India; hero of the epic *Rāmāyana*. He is considered the ideal embodiment of Truth.

Rāmāyana: The most ancient Sanskrit epic poem, written by the sage Vālmīki. It describes the life of Rāmachandra in 50,000 verses.

Ramprasād: A mystic poet of Bengal and composer of devotional songs addressed to the Divine Mother.

Rani Rasmani (1793-1861): The wealthy founder of the Kālī temple complex at Dakshineswar.

rāsālīlā: The dance of Krishna and the gopīs of Vrindāvan.

rishi: A seer of truth or sage.

sacred thread: At the time of initiation into the Gāyatrī mantra one is given a sacred thread to wear, crossed over one shoulder and around the torso.

sādhaka: A term of respect referring to an earnest spiritual aspirant.

sādhanā: Spiritual disciplines.

sādhū: A holy person.

Saguna Brahman: Brahman with attributes; Īśvara, or the Personal God.

sakhya bhāva: Attitude towards God as friend. *See five attitudes.*

samādhi: Ecstasy; communion with God; absorption in the godhead.

samskāras: Deep impressions made by past thoughts and actions. They are retained in the subtle body and carried from life to life.

Sanātana Dharma: The eternal religion.

Sāṅkhya: A philosophy founded by the rishi Kapila.

Sannyāsa: Renunciation. Traditionally, the fourth stage of life. *See four stages of life.*

Sannyāsi: A monk.

Saradananda, Swami (Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty; 1865-1927): One of the sixteen monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sarkar, Dr. Mahendralal (1833-1904): Well-known physician of Calcutta who treated Sri Ramakrishna during his final year.

Satchidānanda: Refers to Brahman as Sat (Existence Absolute), chid (Consciousness or Knowledge Absolute), ānanda (Bliss Absolute).

sattva: Lit., 'luminosity, calmness.' One of the three gunas.

savikalpa samādhi: Communion with God in which the distinction between subject and object is retained. Although the aspirant has no awareness of the world in this state, the dualistic realm of ideas remains, and all ideas, attitudes, and emotions relate to one's Chosen Deity. The difference

between savikalpa and nirvikalpa samādhi is that awareness of the meditator, meditation, and the object of meditation remains in the former state and not in the latter.

Śāktas: Worshipers of the Divine Mother.

Śakti: The power of Brahman/by which creation, preservation, and destruction take place. Śakti also refers to the feminine principle of this divine power, regarded as the Divine Mother of the Universe.

Śankarāchārya: Eighth-century exponent of Advaita (non-dualism). He founded four monasteries and ten monastic orders in India, and he refuted all the great schools of Indian philosophy to prove Advaita to be the highest truth.

śānta bhāva: The attitude of peace and serenity towards God. Many Vaishnavas do not recognize śānta because it is not characterized by an intense love of God. *See five attitudes.*

Śāstra: Scripture.

Śiva: The destroyer, the third god of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Brahma and Vishnu.

Shivananda, Swami (Taraknath Ghosal; 1854-1934): One of Sri Ramakrishna's sixteen monastic disciples.

Śraddhā: The spiritual quality of having great faith and belief in a supreme goal.

Śuka: A great illumined soul; son of Vyāsa. The narrator of the *Bhāgavata*.

Śyāmpukur: A neighbourhood in North Calcutta where Sri Ramakrishna stayed from early September to 11 December 1885 for cancer treatment.

Sītā: The daughter of King Janaka and spiritual consort of Sri Rāma. She is considered an ideal model of purity and devotion.

subtle body: The intellectual (vijñānamayakosha), mental (manomayakosha), and vital (prānamayakosha) sheaths covering the Ātman. It is made up of 17 limbs: five organs of action, five organs of knowledge, five vital forces, mind, and intellect. The subtle body carries from one body to the next all impressions from actions, perceptions, thoughts,

and words. It is destroyed only by Self-knowledge. *See gross body; causal body; five sheaths.*

svagata-bheda: Lit., 'the difference in itself'. An example is a tree that has different parts within the whole: trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits.

sva-samvedya: Those thoughts and spiritual visions that are seen within one's own self, and which are known only by oneself. *See para-samvedya.*

Swamiji: In the Ramakrishna Order, this term refers specifically to Swami Vivekananda. In India this term is used when addressing male monastics.

Tagore, Maharshi Devendranath (1817-1905): A leader of the Ādi Brāhmo Samāj in the late nineteenth century and father of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore.

tamas: Lit., 'dullness, lethargy'. One of the three *gunas*.

tapasyā: Religious austerity.

Tantra: A Hindu scripture.

Tota Puri: A monk of the Śankara Order who initiated Sri Ramakrishna into Vedānta in 1864.

Tulasīdās: A medieval Indian saint and composer of the *Rāmāyana* in Hindi.

Turiya: Lit., 'the fourth'. Transcendental Brahman, which transcends and pervades the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

Turiyananda, Swami (Harinath Chattopadhyay; 1863-1922): One of the sixteen monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Uddhava: A devotee of Sri Krishna.

vaidhī bhakti: Preparatory devotion; certain practices, following prescribed rules, used to cultivate devotion. *See rāga bhakti.*

vairāgya: Renunciation; dispassion; detachment.

Vaishnavas: Devotees of Vishnu who focus on His incarnation as Rāmachandra, Krishna.

Vālmiki: The author of the *Rāmāyana*.

Vāmāchāra: The left-handed, or unorthodox, path of Tantra.

vānaprastha: Lit., 'forest dweller.' Traditionally, the third stage

- of life. In this period householders are supposed to retire to secluded areas to practise spiritual disciplines. *See* **four stages of life**.
- Vārānasī:** One of the ancient holy cities of India; the City of Śiva.
- vātsalya bhāva:** The attitude in which one thinks of God as one's child. *See* **five attitudes**.
- vāyu:** The element air. *See* **five elements**.
- Vedānta:** Lit., 'the end of the Vedas.' One of the six systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy, based mainly on the teachings of the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.
- Vedas:** The four scriptures of recorded experiences of the sages: Rig, Sāma, Yajur, and Atharva. The concluding portion of each Veda consists of various Upanishads.
- Vibhishana:** A half-brother of Rāvana, who tried to persuade Rāvana to follow the path of dharma.
- vidyā-māyā:** The māyā of knowledge; kindness, purity, renunciation and other qualities that lead one to liberation; opposite of avidyā-maya. *See* **māyā**.
- Vidyasagar:** *See* Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.
- Vijaykrishna Goswami (1841-1899):** A leader of the Brāhmo Samāj and devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.
- vīra bhāva:** A Tāntric form of worship appropriate to a person with a heroic nature. *See* **divya bhāva; paśu bhāva**.
- Viśishtādvaita:** *See* **qualified non-dualism**.
- Vishnu:** The Preserver; the second god of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Brahma and Śiva; the Personal God of the Vaishnavas.
- Vishwanath Upadhyay, Captain:** An officer of the Nepalese government and a devotee of the Master. He helped supply materials to build the Holy Mother's cottage near the Dakshineswar temple complex.
- Vivekachudāmani:** Lit., 'the crest jewel of discrimination'. A famous treatise on Vedānta by Śankara.
- Vivekananda, Swami (Narendranath Dutta; 1863-1902):** The chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and, later, organizer of the

Ramakrishna Order of India. In the Ramakrishna Order he is referred to as Swamiji. Sri Ramakrishna indicated that Narendra was one of six Īśvarakotis among his disciples.

Vraja: Vraja is a large area around Mathurā where Sri Krishna grew up among the cowherd boys.

Vrindāvan: A famous holy place on the bank of Yamunā, 80 miles from Delhi, associated with boy Krishna and the cowherd boys and girls.

Vyāsa: The great sage who compiled the four Vedas. He also reputedly composed the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata*.

Yasodā: The foster mother of Krishna.

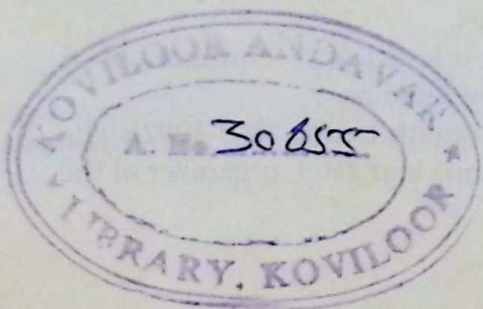
yātrā: A dramatic performance.

yoga: Union of the individual soul with the Universal Soul; also the method by which this union is achieved. There are many yogas. The main ones are bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, karma yoga, and raja yoga.

Yoga Sutras: Aphorisms on yoga, composed by Patanjali.

Yogananda, Swami (Yogin; 1861-1899): One of the sixteen monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He was recognized by Sri Ramakrishna as an Īśvarakoti.

yuga: A cosmic cycle or world period. According to Hindu mythology, the duration of the world is divided into four yugas: Satya, Tretā, Dwāpara, and Kali. In the first, also known as the Golden Age, there is a preponderance of virtue in humanity. With each succeeding yuga virtue diminishes and vice increases. In the Kaliyuga, our current age, there is a minimum of virtue and a great excess of vice.



The swan, it is said, can separate milk from water. She drinks only the milk leaving the water untouched. God is intimately mixed with the world of Maya. Ordinary men cannot distinguish God from His Maya. But the Paramahamsas, the great souls, reject the Maya even as the swan rejects the water. They drink of the milk of Bliss, which is God.

